TANSAN
Look at Me

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Tansan
Translation by H. W. V. Seo

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Translation: H. W. V. Seo
Cover Design: Sophia Xiang
Interior & Layout Design: Amani Rios
Proofreader: Lawrence Hernandez
Copy Editor: R.A. Piper
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PROLOGUE

Ah, that's right, I'm having sex. Heerak Cho thought hazily. His head throbbed; he felt nauseous. He was completely ruined by his hangover. His spinning vision made him feel like dying.

Although he knew many people, he could count the number he considered friends on one hand. It had been a while since they last met, so he went drinking with them. Of course, everyone, and everything, went out of control. There were too many things to talk about; the empty bottles lined themselves up at a terrifying rate.

For some time now, Heerak had been instinctively emitting pheromones without restraint. He thrust his hips wildly, trying to reach an even deeper spot than before.

It was probably the first time he had been inside such a dry and tight hole. It wasn't swallowing up his member as willingly, as he expected.

The panting omega pinned under him wasn't supple at all.

It wasn't easy.

He filled the room to the brim with his pheromones, but the omega wasn't reacting as he expected. A superdominant alpha was excessively spreading his pheromones; most omegas hit with his pheromones would already be intoxicated by the scent, and would be soaking wet. All the omegas he slept with so far actively spread their legs and rolled their hips with pleasure. However, there was no reaction from this omega.

Perhaps this omega was superdominant.

He could understand this reaction if this were an omega who could resist his pheromones with ease.

At some point, Heerak felt a strange uneasiness. This sex felt foreign and strange. It was easy to figure out why.

There was no scent.

He couldn't smell anything from this omega.

It was truly a weird feeling.

To think that he would meet an omega whose pheromones he couldn't smell.

Plus, he was in the middle of having sex. Alpha or omega, they emitted pheromones unconsciously. This would be the prime time to

smell something, when both were racing to the peak of pleasure; it made little sense to hide their pheromones at this time.

Even while his mind was growing fuzzy, Heerak felt his pride take a hit.

He had never felt such humiliation before.

He pushed in roughly on purpose, trying to get a response. His slowly grinding hips changed to rough, unrestrained movements. The sound of flesh pounding on flesh filled the room.

The omega's face was buried in a pillow. He moaned through the pillow, clutched tightly with both hands. Every time Heerak thrust up with force, he could faintly hear him letting out sighs wet with tears.

What even was this situation?

His mood gradually dampened. Whether Heerak did it gently or passionately, this omega seemed like he would continue to hold back his voice while hunched over.

This was no fun at all.

Rather than having sex, this felt like…

Heerak frowned. His enthusiastic hip movements slowed to a halt. He lowered himself, his sweaty skin pressing down close to the other's.

"Hey." He leaned down and whispered close to the omega's ear. Because of his close contact, he could feel the omega underneath flinch. He thought the trembling omega was cute, so he licked the omega's neck and earlobe. He could feel the omega's trembling intensify.

Heerak grinned and muttered in a low voice, "Am I raping you, by any chance?"

He thought it was a bit absurd, but he had no choice but to ask. If that were the case, he would need to stop immediately.

As soon as he asked that question, the head buried in the pillow shook aggressively. Heerak grinned to himself as he saw the head moving wildly from side to side.

There's no way I would do that.

No matter how drunk he was, he did not think that he would push down an unwilling omega and rape him. Rape itself was something he shouldn't do. Moreover, he couldn't imagine himself dragging a person who was refusing him to bed. It was a matter of pride. His philosophy was: *"I don't like people who don't like me."* He never had

a lack of partners, either. There was always a line-up of omegas who wanted to sleep with him, and he could have his pick from any of them.

He lacked nothing, so why would he need to rape anyone?

Heerak let out a laugh. He had cooled down after imagining something absurd.

"So, that means we're sleeping with each other consensually?" Even so he asked once more to confirm. Although it was a relief that this was not rape, he couldn't shake off the feeling of uneasiness.

The omega who answered him straight away beforehand, took his time to answer. Listening closely, he could hear the omega whimpering. He had no idea why the omega was reluctant to answer if this wasn't rape.

The omega's silence made a strange desire pop up. Heerak stirred around the omega's insides with his member still buried deeply within. He rolled his hips in a circular motion, and then penetrated inside brusquely. Every time he pounded against him, the body underneath shook like a leaf, which gave Heerak a sense of satisfaction.

Heerak nibbled on the other's earlobe and asked again. "Answer me. It's consensual, right?"

At that, the omega nodded reluctantly. The slow up and down movements of the omega's head made Heerak grin once more. Although his face was buried under the pillow, it was easy to imagine what kind of expression the other had. He was sure the other was making a bitter face.

"Let's see your face then. Don't act so hard to get."

The reaction that came back was more fervent than ever. He shook his head zealously and his body was even shaking badly. The obvious refusal made Heerak flinch.

"I get it. I'm not going to force you."

He felt like he needed more than words. As if to soothe his trembling partner, he licked and sucked at the other's exposed body, starting from his neck and shoulders. He licked off his salty sweat and impulsively left kisses.

It was more effective than he thought. He could feel the other loosening his tension. His nape and earlobe were flushed once more in red. It was quite a delicious sight.

After Heerak's pressing questions were answered, other questions started flooding into his head. They lingered on the tip of his tongue.

This omega's lower half did not show a single sign of getting wet; plus, it was strange that he wasn't leaking out any pheromones. He also wondered how in the world they came to be having sex with each other.

Does he not like my pheromones? he wondered, but he didn't want to ask. He felt like he would be too insulted to continue if the returning answer was affirmative.

Since the other didn't want to show his face, Heerak felt that he should assess the situation by watching. He would feel bad if he were the only one enjoying the act, and his partner wasn't into it at all.

Thanks to that, Heerak observed his partner more meticulously than ever. He paid attention to the sounds his partner made when he buried himself deep within, and felt the trembling of the other when he grazed his teeth on his neck. Heerak tried not to miss a single thing. Because they were sticking close to each other, he could pick up the slightest reaction. He adjusted his movements more carefully than before. He wanted to find the spot that made this omega melt with pleasure.

He felt good, and he hoped the omega did, as well.

There were a lot of things missing from this sex. The insides did not leak out fluid in reaction to his alpha pheromones. The omega's cloyingly sweet pheromones weren't hanging in the air. There were no pleas, begging him to penetrate deeper, or to move faster.

Still, he felt good. He wondered why.

Heerak looked to the side. The fingers that gripped the pillow loosened and tightened. Watching those squirming fingers that did not know what to do made Heerak smile.

He overlapped his hands with the other's. The omega gasped in surprise. It was a good reaction. While he was at it, he interlocked fingers with him. The omega's shoulder shook in response.

"Do you like this?"

After a pause, there was a nod in agreement. Heerak couldn't help but smile at the nodding head.

He felt jittery. It was the first time he had this kind of sex.

Clasping hands and sticking himself close, he moved his hips. The hesitant and tight insides slowly opened up.

He didn’t know why, but despite having consensual sex with this omega, he had initially felt uncomfortable. But this feeling softened and eased, just after holding hands. He couldn’t help but realize how hard the omega was trying to accept Heerak’s growing member.

The omega’s grip tightened. It was almost too hesitant, as if what he was doing was something to be concerned about. Heerak smiled to himself and tightened his grip as an answer. He couldn’t be sure, but he felt like the omega was smiling faintly.

It doesn’t feel like I have a condom on.

Heerak was usually very thorough, and always had a condom on hand. But for some reason, today he didn’t have one. Of course, there was no way he would remember, since he couldn’t even recall how he got in this situation to start with.

He felt himself get dizzy.

Surely he would fall asleep at this rate. Every time he felt the need to come, his mind was flooded with the need to sleep. The omega’s embrace was just right for him. The thin moans with every roll of his hips were good as well.

He buried his lips in the other’s neck and listened closely.

He could hear the heated breath of the other man. With every soft breath, he felt a sweetness spreading near his heart.

This was good in its own way.

But maybe it would’ve been better if he could hear the other’s voice.

He would’ve felt satisfied, if only just to witness the other’s voice dripping in sweetness and calling his name. He wondered what this omega’s voice sounded like.

Heerak chuckled to himself.

He was having sex with someone whose voice and face he didn’t know. He found this situation ludicrous. For the first time, he felt frustrated at the missing pieces of his memory.

The satisfaction and fatigue from sex made his eyes blurry with sleep. Heerak let his eyelids close on their own.

Maybe this could have all been a dream, he thought.

And that was fine. He felt good either way, so it didn’t matter if this was a dream.

He simply wanted to linger inside this omega for a long time.

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I

When he opened his eyes, he was alone.

I really wasn't myself last night. I guess I was more drunk than I let on… was the first thought that came across his mind. He didn't think he would wake up to such a shabby room.

Heerak sat up in the bed and laughed hollowly. An old-fashioned matchbox. A tissue wrapper with the phone number of an on-call masseuse in large numbers. As he looked at the things on the nightstand, his hollow laugh grew. The only items he could recognize were his watch, car keys, and wallet.

He wanted to take a quick shower, but changed his mind as soon as he took one look inside the bathroom. Instead, Heerak reached out for his clothes hung neatly on old hangers. Throughout all of this, he could not help but laugh out loud at the strange tingling sensation in his body, and the absurdness of the situation. He didn't even know how his clothes got here. He clearly had not been in the state of mind to hang up his clothes neatly on the hangers, so it was obvious that this was the work of the other person.

He wondered who that person was.

Just thinking about it made his head ache.

The bathroom that made him want to scream in horror, his neatly hung clothes, and the omega whose identity was a mystery; he could not think about it any longer. He only woke up thanks to a call from the front desk, informing him that it was near checkout time. In any case, he needed to leave as soon as possible.

Heerak received one useful piece of information at the front desk; a man helped him, and booked a room to spend the night with him. He asked about the man's appearance and clothing, but the only thing the employee could say with a quizzical voice was, "Well, he was just very normal, I think?"

Then could you check the security camera footage?

Heerak barely managed to swallow that question. His face was quite well-known, so he needed to be careful of what he said. What if he asked to check surveillance footage just to confirm who the person who helped him was? Anyone would find that suspicious. And the employee would not have shown the footage so easily, either.

Heerak stepped outside and stared into the street for a while, getting his bearings.

The light poured in, blinding him.

The room he came out of had thick curtains blocking the light. He had not been able to tell whether it was night or day, and now that he was outside, the brilliant sunlight was shining down on the streets. He felt somewhat bewildered at the brightness.

He wondered what time it was, and checked his phone. It was 1:35 P.M.

While he had his phone out, he decided to call someone. He pressed a speed dial number for a few seconds, and the name *"Seokchan Min"* popped up.

"Executive Director? What's the matter? Did something happen?"

The phone barely rang twice before the person speaking on the phone picked up. They sounded shocked and worried.

Seokchan Min was Heerak's right-hand man. After hearing his secretary's voice hundreds of times, he had never felt so relieved to hear it as he was today. He didn't think there would come a day that he was so relieved to hear his secretary that he would be shaking.

"Sir? Hello?"

Incredulous laughter escaped Heerak's mouth.

His sense of reality that had been missing since dawn seemed to slowly come back. He just couldn't stop the laughter. He had been thinking, *"Was it a dream? Was I just dreaming this whole time*?", so he couldn't help but laugh as he slowly came back to reality.

"Director, by any chance—"

Seokchan groaned audibly.

Today was Saturday.

His boss wouldn't have called him on the weekend just to laugh if this wasn't urgent. Something was off.

"Have you been drinking?"

"No!"

“Although alcohol caused a problem,” Heerak added quietly, which made the man on the other side let out a deep sigh.

Seokchan said he would pick him up immediately,nand Heerak agreed, thanking him . He wanted to grab someone and tell them about his experience last night, and everything that had happened since.

Heerak got into his car, the most noticeable vehicle in the motel’s parking garage. He realized that his stomach didn’t feel so good. Now that he was back to reality, he felt a headache and extreme hunger coming on. He opened the messaging app on his phone and texted his secretary, telling him to pick up something to cure his hangover on the way home, and then started his car.

* * *

Seokchan always exceeded his expectations.

He brought a packaged bowl of jjamppong, a dish that Heerak enjoyed eating as a hangover cure. It was also the dish that Heerak ate while sinking his body into his favorite sofa after taking a nice shower.

The hangover cure drinks that his secretary bought also alleviated some of the remnants of the past night’s drinking. Waiting patiently for Heerak to finish eating, Seokchan opened his mouth.

“What happened?”

As soon as Heerak put a cigarette between his lips, Seokchan took out his zippo lighter. As his secretary lit up his cigarette, Heerak narrowed his eyes.

“I thought about it while I was in the shower, but I really can’t recall anything.”

“You can start with what you remember.”

At his secretary’s persuasion, Heerak combed through his memories once more.

His group of friends got dead drunk at Hodie, one of the many businesses that Heerak ran as the executive director. Hodie had around 20 private rooms of various sizes, and operated by appointment only.

At first, he simply thought this would be a convenient business to have, but before he knew it, Hodie grew successful by word of mouth.

Those who wished to discuss business in private visited frequently.

The room where Heerak and his friends drank was Hodie's largest room. His friends were sensitive to the public eye, but in that room, they could drink to their heart's content and chatter on like excited children. He couldn't remember how many bottles of alcohol they drank altogether.

He remembered that he and his friends laughed at another friend, who said he was still recovering from jet lag, and smashed his head face first into the table. Soon, they started to pass out, dropping like flies. Not long after, his friends disappeared from the table as they were dragged out by their entourage or employees one by one.

Heerak had grasped onto his thread of consciousness towards the end of the night, and managed to ask the manager to call a chauffeur. The alcohol made him feel a bit sick; he wanted to breathe in the fresh air.

The general public did not need to see him so out of control. The dizziness made him wobble, but he could still walk. He could also pass his car keys to the manager, coherently telling them he would be sitting on the bench outside, and to send the chauffeur to him.

While Heerak said in a roundabout way that he pretended to be tough in front of his employees, Seokchan's face grew darker. And then he said, in an equally dark tone, "What do you mean, you called a chauffeur. That wouldn't look good for your image. You should have called me."

"I thought about it, but I remembered it was the weekend. I thought you deserved some rest," Heerak said in a playful tone, and Seokchan sighed.

"Did you black out at that point?"

"Yeah. I remember right up to the point where I fell asleep in the car's backseat. I was leaning on someone's shoulder. The next time I mentally woke up, I was in the middle of having sex. And then I remember waking up in a motel room alone, for the first time in my life."

"I see that the most important parts are missing."

"That's what I'm saying."

After a moment of thinking, Seokchan said, "I'll ask Manager Moon first, then find out who the chauffeur was from the car

company. Once we find that person, we might be able to hear the description of who lent you their shoulder."

Heerak chuckled. "No, there's no point in asking. The only description you'd get is that he was an average-looking guy."

"You already asked around?"

"I asked the front desk staff at the motel on my way out. I almost asked if I could check their security footage," Heerak said.

"Security cameras. That's it."

"Huh?"

"You could check Hodie's surveillance footage."

Heerak's eyes gleamed. He finally felt the uncomfortable feeling in his chest lessen.

"Now that I think about it, I didn't hear your reasons for wanting to find him. Why do you need to find that man?" Seokchan asked.

"I think I really enjoyed embracing him. He was a unique omega. The memory of shaking my hips until I lost all consciousness is still fresh in my mind."

Seokchan smiled bitterly.

Heerak answered his smile with one of his own.

"I see. And?"

"I didn't wear a condom."

Seokchan's face hardened. Just as Heerak said, alcohol did indeed *cause a problem*.

"Then you really must find him."

"I do."

He wanted to avoid the situation where an omega would demand Heerak to take responsibility for his pregnancy. It was hard for him to imagine that omega, who was happy just from holding hands, with a pregnant belly shamelessly demand Heerak to take responsibility. However, people were unpredictable, so he could not easily overlook this.

***

Saturday was a battle with the exhaustion that followed the hangover. Sunday, as always, was used for recharging his strength for the week; he emptied his brain, and spent the day as if he were one with his bed.

And then Monday came around.

To be succinct, it was a failure.

They checked the CCTV footage from around Hodie.

Heerak found the clip that he wanted, but the omega's face did not appear. The camera was too far away. However, he could extrapolate what had happened from the footage.

In the video, Heerak leaned his head back onto the backrest of the bench. He was pretty sure he fell asleep like that, right on the bench. A few minutes later, someone approached him. He knew immediately that the person in the footage was the omega he was looking for.

The omega appeared to try to talk to Heerak. Even though it wasn't the season to say something along the lines of, *"You'll freeze to death if you fall asleep here,"* a conscientious person would not have been able to walk past someone who was passed out.

How could someone show concern for a drunkard in this dangerous day and age? He must be either extremely kind, or very ignorant.

"He must have picked me up on his way home," he said to Seokchan.

"This isn't the time to be joking."

The voice seemed to rouse the Heerak in the video, as he sat up slowly. Suddenly, he grabbed the omega's wrist. The two people in the footage were conversing, then got into the back seat of the car that arrived not long after. The car quickly disappeared from view, bringing the video to an end.

"That was 1:00 o'clock in the morning. There are only a limited number of people who would be around the front of Hodie at that hour of day; I think we could find him easily. If we need to, we can check all the surveillance footage from inside Hodie."

"Do we really need to? He's clearly not a customer; he walked by the club, not out of it. And look at what he's wearing."

Heerak could understand why the motel staff called the person average-looking. He wore jeans and a t-shirt, attire that half the people on the streets would be wearing. Unless he had an exceptionally striking appearance or he was a celebrity, one would no doubt call him average.

"That's true. Then…"

Seokchan trailed off and smiled vaguely. Heerak felt like he knew what his secretary was thinking.

Maybe he works at Hodie.

Although Heerak was the executive director, the operation and management of the business was under complete control of the manager. Heerak had only met a small fraction of the employees. Also, Heerak also did not spend much time there. The only people he was familiar with were the manager and the lobby staff in charge of appointments and entry logs.

“Let Manager Moon know.”

“Understood.”

* * *

Staff Notice

The Executive Director is looking for the person who helped him into his car on Saturday, around 1:00 A.M. He is desperately searching for him, so if that person is an employee of ours, we sincerely hope they can step forward.

The message that Seokchan conveyed to Manager Moon went straight to all of the staff at Hodie. Thanks to the posting, the person was found after only half a day.

“You found him?”

“Yes.”

When Seokchan called, Heerak was just entering the HW head office after being summoned by his father. The call came when he was right in front of the chairman’s office, so he took a step back; he didn’t think that this was a conversation that he should be having in front of his father. As it turned out, that was a good judgement call.

“That’s good. He was an employee, after all?”

“That’s correct.”

Heerak frowned, creating a furrow in his forehead. “I can’t believe I laid my hands on an employee. I should quit drinking.”

“I agree that that is also a problem.”

“Are you implying there’s another issue?”

“Yes,” Seokchan mumbled vaguely.

“I personally do not believe this is a big issue. No, rather, I think this may be for the best. But you might think differently, Executive Director.”

‘What’s that supposed to mean?’

Heerak could not understand his secretary. But he didn’t think that he would be able to come up with the answer by dwelling on it, so he did as Seokchan suggested and headed to Hodie to meet the omega in question.

Not long after, Heerak came face to face with the omega in question. They were the only two people left in Hodie’s office.

Ten minutes had passed since he arrived, but Heerak could not say a word. The first and last thing he said was “You can sit comfortably,” to the man who stood up from his seat when Heerak entered.

Heerak gawked at the omega who was sitting up straight on the couch. Then he started looking around the room anxiously, avoiding his stare. Heerak circled the desk, stopped at the window, and then approached the couch again.

All the while, the man in question never left his sight.

Heerak flipped through the thin stack of papers on the desk once more. They were documents that Seokchan shoved in his arms, saying that it would be good if he skimmed through them before going into the office.

He’s a beta.

His birthdate and other miscellaneous information did not enter his line of vision.

That word filled Heerak’s mind.

The moment he stepped foot into the office, Heerak was hit with a bad feeling. He could not feel any pheromones whatsoever from that man. Some omegas and alphas sprayed pheromone deodorizers regularly at work, so he thought that this man could be one of them. However, his premonition came true—unless these documents were lies.

“Let me ask you a few questions,” Heerak finally said, and sat across from the man.

The man lifted his head, nodding lightly. “Okay.”

“So, you were a beta,” Heerak stated.

“Yes.”

The man himself confirmed it. Now this became a truth that he could not deny anymore.

No, wait.

Heerak wracked his brain. He didn't need to jump to conclusions just yet.

"Then on Saturday night, uh…"

What was his name again?

As if he read his thoughts, the man replied to Heerak quietly.

"My name is Doseon Yoon."

"Right. Mr. Yoon. Were you the one who helped me into my car?"

"Yes."

"And you also got in the car with me?"

"Yes."

"And then? Where did you get off?"

The instantaneous answers stopped. Instead, Doseon looked at Heerak as if to ask why he was asking those questions.

Heerak did not respond; instead, he stared right back in silence.

After a moment of silence, Doseon parted his lips and said, "I got off at the same place as you, Director."

"Where did we get off?"

A possibility swirled around Heerak's mind.

Right, we could have gotten in the same car. In my drunken state, I could have generously offered a ride to my employee, who was worried and just getting off work. Thus, the person I slept with could have been a different person than the one I got in the car with.

From the moment he saw the fuzzy image of the man on the surveillance footage, he was certain that that person was the omega he spent the night with. Now, he desperately wanted this to not be true.

Unfortunately, Doseon answered firmly.

"It was a motel."

Heerak let out a sharp breath.

There was no escape now. He had to concede to the facts before him. Heerak Cho slept with a beta. He had to accept this as reality.

Heerak rubbed his face with his hands and mumbled, ashamed, "Please be more specific. I'll apologize in advance, but I really can't

remember anything. So, could you tell me a bit more about what happened that night?"

Doseon nodded and answered, "Where should I start?"

"Start from when you found me."

"I found you on my way off work. You were sleeping on a bench, so I got worried. I was worried because I knew that you were our executive director. I then asked if you were all right, and if I should call my manager. Then you suddenly grabbed my wrist," he explained.

"I see."

"You stared at my face for a while and then asked, "Do you wanna do it with me?" so I responded with, "What do you mean by that?" and you replied, "What else but sex?" I couldn't believe what I was hearing so I asked, "Are you serious?" Then you smiled and said, "I can't be more serious than I am now.""

Heerak wanted to sit and listen but he could not take it any longer.

"Argh, fuck!" Heerak blurted out without thinking.

Panic flashed on Doseon's stoic face.

Heerak waved his hand and pressed around his eye with his other hand. "Oh, sorry. I wasn't saying it to you. I was talking to myself. Please continue."

"Okay. Then the car came, and I got in with you. I asked you where you wanted to be dropped off and you said, "Wherever I can sleep with you as soon as possible." and immediately fell asleep. I wasn't able to ask about your address, so I asked the driver to take us to the closest accommodations."

Heerak looked like he was about to bury his head into the ground, but at that moment he jolted back up. He was sure that everything that Doseon said was true. There was no doubt about it. The man in front of him did not seem like a liar, and the things Heerak supposedly said sounded plausible.

He had a very bad feeling about this.

Heerak was quick to figure out why he felt so uneasy.

"Doseon Yoon. Let's make one thing clear."

"Okay."

"I asked you if this was rape when we were having sex, right?"

Doseon nodded to show that he was listening, and answered, “Yes.”

“How did you answer that question?”

“I said that it wasn’t.”

“Right? You said that it wasn’t rape. But I noticed something weird while I was listening to you. You said you knew that I was the executive director.”

“Yes.”

“Then, did you consent because you couldn’t refuse your superior’s request? I’m really worried about…”

Before Heerak could finish his question, Doseon answered resolutely, “That was not the case at all.”

“Is that so? Then why did you come into the motel with me?”

Doseon looked like he did not understand Heerak’s question, which made Heerak become a bit anxious. He felt like he asked something he shouldn’t have, even though he knew that this was a question that could be answered fairly easily.

“Executive Director.”

At the serious face of the other, Heerak answered “Yes?”

Meeting eyes with him, he heard a truly unexpected question.

“Is there anyone in this world who could truly refuse your advances?”

Heerak’s eyes widened.

“What the heck is that? Is that a compliment? Wow, I’m flattered,” Heerak laughed, embarrassed.

No reaction came back from Doseon.

Whether or not the person in front of him blabbed away while laughing, Doseon sat steadfastly with a blank expression. Heerak awkwardly cleared his throat.

There was another moment of tense silence.

Heerak stared at the motionless man who sat opposite him. He too would have described the man across from him as an “average guy.” If the other man were an omega, Heerak would have been able to describe the smell of his pheromones, but that was impossible to do for a beta.

He knew it was rude, but he could not help checking out Doseon. And the more he observed him, he realized again that he was really

drunk that night. It would have been nice if he could give an excuse, that this wasn't a face that he would have wanted to fuck, beta or not.

He was the epitome of average.

He had a very average face.

"I… I really did have sex with you, then…" Heerak muttered to himself, feeling empty.

Despite having spoken it under his breath, Doseon could hear it.

There were many inferences embedded in what he said. '*With a beta. With such an average joe like you. How come*?' All his regret and restlessness were mixed in with that single utterance.

He did not know how the other man interpreted what he just said. However, it was easy to tell that Heerak's mood was down just from the depressed tone of his voice.

"Yes, because you drank too much."

All emotions left Heerak's face. His usually bright face became much like that of the expressionless man sitting in front of him. He could not understand what he had just heard. Also, he could be wrong, but Doseon sounded like he was trying to comfort Heerak. That made him feel even more conflicted.

Now that he thought about it, even if he were speaking in a rude tone, the other man was saying some absurd things. He could not get a grasp on Doseon's intentions.

"What do you mean? Are you saying that I wouldn't give you a second glance if I wasn't so drunk?" Heerak asked dryly.

"Yes."

Of course.

It was an irrefutable truth.

If he wasn't so intoxicated, there was no way he would have slept with a beta.

As it was, this current situation was very bizarre.

Putting Heerak's questions aside, Doseon was consistently answering them without any sign of awkwardness, which Heerak found strange. He was not showing any signs of self-hate, nor was he upset with Heerak. He looked like someone who was only being honest; there was no hesitation or sorrow.

"Executive Director, I should apologize to you," Doseon blurted out, catching Heerak off guard.

Heerak's eyes narrowed more than before. He kept being hit with an indescribable feeling.

"To me? Why?"

"It all happened so fast that I had no time to stop and think about it. But when I went back home, I thought that I should have refused you for your sake, and I regretted my decision. You were inebriated, but ultimately you ended up having slept with someone like me. Nobody would feel good about that."

What was with this guy?

Thoughts that Heerak couldn't say out loud swam about in his head. He thought that by this point, he could probably call it a psychological attack.

"I have a question for you too, Executive Director."

"Yes, go ahead," Heerak answered, rubbing his temples.

"Why did you look for me?"

"Oh. I didn't think that I would sleep with a beta, and before I met you, I strongly believed that you were an omega. I didn't use contraceptives that night, you know? I didn't have the chance to, either. So I was concerned."

Doseon nodded as if he understood.

"I see. Then I really did something inexcusable to you."

Is this where I should also apologize? Sorry for screwing you?

Heerak pondered for a moment, but drew a blank. Right now, his head felt like it was splitting, even more so than when he was hungover.

In any case, Heerak needed to end this conversation. He could no longer continue while his head was pounding, and he felt miserable.

"Doseon, if there's anything you want from me, feel free to tell me."

"Anything I want from you?"

"Yes, cash is fine. A car or a house is fine, too. There must be something I could do for you."

Anything was fine.

As long as the request wasn't ridiculous, Heerak had a mind to grant whatever it was that Doseon wanted. And whatever that may be, as long as he could exchange it for a single document affirming that Doseon would never bother him about what happened, this issue would be solved. Although since he could not erase memories,

he would have no choice but to smile bitterly whenever the memory resurfaced.

After some thought, Doseon said in a determined voice, “I already got what I wanted.”

“You got what you want?”

Did Seokchan take care of it already?

A faint smile spread on Heerak’s lips. Seokchan was quick to do his job, but he didn’t think he would be this fast. He did not think that Seokchan would have already sat down with the other party, and gone ahead with negotiations before Heerak had the chance to speak with him.

“Did you make a deal with my secretary before I came in?”

“No, that’s not what happened.”

The serious and stoic face softened just a bit. It was when Heerak was observing the hesitant, downcast eyes that Doseon opened his mouth again.

“To be honest, I have never slept with anyone before. You were my first, Director.”

Heerak bolted up from his seat, totally and completely floored.

He was so shocked that he stood up unconsciously. Doseon looked up at him with dull, placid eyes. Heerak sat back down. The best he could do right now was to try and keep his face void of all emotion.

He was a virgin? This is driving me crazy, fucking hell!

If Doseon said something old-fashioned, like telling him to take responsibility for his first time, Heerak was sure that the calm façade he was barely managing would break down.

“When you grabbed my hand that night, one thought crossed my mind. I thought, when else would I get the chance to sleep with someone like you in my lifetime? I felt extremely fortunate that I could have my first experience with someone like you.”

Before, he was speechless because of the absurdity of the situation. However, now, he had no idea why he couldn’t say a thing. He could only continue to listen with his mouth gaping open.

“You might consider that night an unfortunate accident; I am truly sorry about that. But when it comes to me, I was left with a good memory, of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I’m very grateful for that.”

At the end of his speech, Doseon bowed slightly.

Another silence ensued.

Heerak stared at the man in front of him with a dumbfounded face. Doseon looked like he was waiting for Heerak to tell him to go back to work.

"It was a good memory for you. That's it? The end?" Heerak finally said. Although he could manage his facial expressions, he could not hide the astonishment in his voice.

"Should I need something more than that?"

"I think I would feel better if there was something material involved."

Because it would become extremely annoying and bothersome to deal with if you changed your mind later.

Heerak pushed down the additional comments that were on the tip of his tongue, and instead let out a long sigh. That was all he could do. But no matter how many times he exhale , he could not get his discomfort to go away.

"You want to pretend this never happened, right?"

He was wondering what Doseon would say, but he was taken aback again. At this point, Heerak thought Doseon was amazing. How could he ask this without so much of a blink of an eye?

Heerak hesitated for a moment.

"Exactly."

Heerak's hesitation was brief, but that hesitation annoyed him to no end. He angrily rubbed at the furrows in his forehead, attempting to get rid of those negative feelings.

Doseon nodded as if he expected that answer.

"Then let's do that." At the questioning look from Heerak, he added, "Nothing happened that night. You don't need to do anything for me."

Doseon's eyes seemed to ask, "*That's all, right? Is this over?*"

Heerak turned his head away from those intense eyes.

What's this now?

What a rollercoaster of unexpected emotions.

He felt like his pride was hurt because he seemed to have lost the upper hand of the conversation. Also, he felt like he was the only one feeling stunned by this situation, which annoyed him. What he disliked the most was that it felt like he was the one desperately

jumping around, and the other offered to compromise and do as he wanted, to stop Heerak from worrying.

"How can you expect me to believe you? You could say one thing today and another tomorrow, no? Just receive something, anything, from me. Let me feel better," Heerak said in desperation.

Doseon seemed to think hard about it.

"Then I'll receive 40,000 won from you."

"40,000 won?"

"What was this random number?" Heerak asked back, feeling dumbfounded, but Doseon nodded seriously.

"Yes. The motel fee that night was 80,000 won."

The last thread of Heerak's sanity snapped.

He leaned forward, head in his hands.

Laughter came out. To be exact, nothing but laughter could come out.

It was strange that someone like Heerak, who only ate up omegas, slept with a beta. But this man was even stranger; he kept saying the strangest things.

Even when he was tasting the bitter things in life, he never once thought that he wanted to turn back time. He was always optimistic, and considered all experiences to have an immaterial value.

Today was different.

Today, all he really wanted was to go back in time. It would be so nice if he could go back to that night, before anything happened.

Nothing came to mind in the situation he was in right now. He also felt like he needed some time to think by himself.

Heerak decided to finally tell Doseon what he wanted to hear for a while now. He said in a weak voice, "You can go back to work."

"Yes, sir. I will take my leave then."

He heard the other man leave without hesitation.

Heerak finally managed to lift his head to watch the other man as he left. It was hard to see this man, dressed in a white dress shirt and black pants, as the same person as the naked man he devoured that night. Plus, his voice and attitude were composed from start to finish. He could hardly believe that this man was the same person from that night.

Where did that cute person, whose neck turned red from their interlocking hands, go?

Heerak clicked his tongue and let out a deep sigh.

He felt sorry for Seokchan, but he was determined that from now on, he would call his secretary when he became drunk, even if it was the weekend.

He did not want to have this strange experience again.

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Heerak Cho, 32 years old.

The fourth child of Heetak Cho, HW Group's chairman, and a super-dominant alpha.

He expressed his disinterest in succession for the company as soon as he graduated from university. He had wanted to immediately step away from his siblings' unimaginably bloody feud for the top spot. His father adored his clever, youngest son, who was not too overwhelmingly intelligent, but not too lacking. He sincerely wished that his youngest son would participate in the battle for the rights of company succession as an excellent marplot. Obviously, he was against Heerak breaking away, and continuously tried to dissuade him.

Deviating away from the succession battle wasn't on impulse. Heerak came to this conclusion after some serious thinking.

He could, of course, become the final winner. However, he would need to rely on luck. In addition to luck, he would have to pour great effort into obtaining good results while showing off something unique to both parents and the board of directors regularly. This was on top of the handicap of having a late start compared to his brothers and sister, who had already started to stack up on achievements.

Heerak thought hard.

Just as he could become the ultimate winner, it was equally likely that he could become the ultimate loser. He would have to live a suffocating life, ruin his relationship with his older siblings, and if luck wasn't on his side he could end up being labeled a failure and forced to make do with subsidiary companies.

That could be his future.

He did not want that.

No matter how he thought about it, that kind of lifestyle just wasn't fun.

Wasn't it fine to leave out at least one child and not make him a pawn in the grand scheme of things? He tried to persuade his father with sugar-coated sincerity, but his father wasn't convinced so easily.

Heerak changed tactics.

The only person who had his father in the palm of his hands was his male-omega, superdominant mother.

It was a wise decision to win over his mother. His mother was supportive and all that Heerak could ask for. His father could control his children, but he was a devoted husband who lost many arguments to his wife. Heerak did not know how his father was coaxed into it, but he was eventually allowed to break away.

His siblings wanted their youngest, independent sibling to be on their side. He and his elder sister, who he got along with the best, had a meal with each other at least once a week. He maintained his relationship with his older brothers by going golfing and accompanying them to other events. Everything was going according to Heerak's blueprint.

Being born with a silver spoon in his mouth let him live comfortably.

And now, he got to live a life that others could only envy.

As if to tell him that life wouldn't be fun if everything went smoothly, there were times where his plans failed. The café franchise that he started with his mother's help ended in great failure. Despite the café making money, Heerak still considered it a failure. No matter what he did, he could not overcome the number-one brand which made people line up from the early morning, just to grab a limited-edition tumbler. No matter how aggressive the marketing was and how hard he grilled the PR team, he just could not get to first place. If he could not get first place, walking away from the succession battle was meaningless. Heerak quickly sold his shares, and turned his sights to his next-best plan.

He then set his eyes on the food industry. Heerak launched Sartago, a family restaurant with a salad bar as its main feature. His parents and siblings were doubtful of its success and called it a red ocean, but Heerak pushed through with it. Once a month, he would choose one place in the world, and have a special salad bar with that region's specialty cuisine. If one month was Busan's milmyeon, the next month could be Chicago, and feature Chicago-style deep-dish

pizza. He also determined that the decline in family diners was due to the high price, so he drastically lowered the cost.

It was a wild success. He got to taste the victory that he had been waiting for all his life.

He struck while the iron was hot, and expanded his restaurant extensively. Now he could see the signboard for Sartago in every corner of Korea. His siblings, who invested with no real expectation, could all smile proudly and say that they always knew that he could do it. Now that Sartago was at the top of all the articles about family restaurants, Heerak could finally smile in satisfaction.

It didn't end there.

Heerak dyed his hair.

At first, he dyed it an ivory color. It lasted less than two weeks. His hair looked almost white under the light—this amused his father, but his mother had a problem with it. The terse message from his mom that said "Son, I like that you look handsome doing anything; but I think you would be more handsome if you knew some restraint," sent shivers down Heerak's spine, and he quickly compromised.

While photos of his siblings in stiff suits appeared on the covers of financial magazines, Heerak's shiny, light brown hair swept away various media outlets. It wasn't long until Heerak became the center of attention.

He was 188 cm tall and had well-maintained and fair skin. He had a bright impression and good looks, and could even be considered beautiful. Swathed in high-end designer clothes and accessories, Heerak looked ready for the runway, and attracted everyone's attention.

His unprecedented path stretched on.

Heerak used social media proactively to promote his restaurant. As its executive director, every first day of the month, Heerak would have the first meal at Sartago's salad bar. He posted the obvious *"I like this month's theme. Amazing,"* but he also posted comments like, *"I think there will be a split in preferences for this month's menu,"* or *"Not really to my tastes. People who like spicy food might agree with me."* That wasn't all; Heerak also exposed his private life on social media. They included pictures of him drinking beer in his

penthouse terrace past midnight, or him shaking in joy when the supercar that he was waiting for finally arrived.

The masses showed a very positive reaction to this side of Heerak.

Heerak's lifestyle was in such a different dimension that people felt a sense of detachment. Instead of feeling inferior, there were more people who were curious about Heerak's lifestyle, then there were people who thought it was excessive. The lives of the children of leading conglomerate families and famous businessmen and women were always so secretive; the masses thought that they would continue to live in secrecy. Heerak shattered that perception.

Heerak wrote things like *"I'm kind of hungry, so I came to the convenience store. What tastes good? There are so many things that look good,"* and people would comment with their favorite packaged meals and sandwich recommendations. Heerak listened to some of those recommendations and uploaded a photo of his purchase, along with his review of it.

He accepted all of the interviews that came in for him. In exchange, he sent a letter to all the news outlets that he would accept interviews on the condition that they exclude all headlines and text that illustrated him as an "heir," "third-generation chaebol," or "successor" as the last son of the chairman of HW Group. He did that for his siblings' peace of mind and for his future going forward. The media faithfully obliged.

The financial and entertainment magazines attached keywords like "young legend," "a new wave," and "unrivaled presence" to Heerak. To take it further, he did not hesitate to make TV appearances in different ways. On cooking variety shows, he would say things like "I think pouring the sauce over tangsuyuk is inhuman," or "I'm on team tteokbokki. Soondae is always number two when there's tteokbokki," which made people laugh and love him even more.

Everyone loved this easygoing and amicable "young and beautiful executive director." Eventually, he was able to have his name on the top of most lists about favorite businessmen and women, most influential figures, and so on.

As time slipped by, he reached his ultimate goal.

Heerak was able to open his own shopping mall earlier than expected. He originally planned to open one in his mid-thirties, but

he was able to achieve this life-long dream in his early thirties, something that awed those around him.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony at the grand opening of his mall had a long queue of media outlets and onlookers who wanted a glimpse of the handsome director. Heerak expressed his gratitude to them. From beginning to end, smiling without falter, he was generous with his handshakes and hugs, and accepted all requests to take photos, as long as time allowed.

Everything ran smoothly now. Of course, when he recalled the café, he swelled up in anger, but it was now to the point where he could ignore it. He simply thought this was one of the hardships he had no control over.

But this time.

This time, in this instance, he had no control. And he didn't like it.

"I slept with a beta. Can you believe that?" Heerak muttered.

Seokchan broke out into a smile and retorted, "How many more times are you going to say that before you're satisfied?"

"I just can't understand it at all."

Like with most people, Heerak liked delicious things. To him, delicious things included omegas.

Due to his long-term plans, he had sex, but had never seriously dated anyone. If he wanted to, he could easily sleep with anyone he wanted, but problems could crop up just as easily. Heerak had a few partners just so he could regularly have sex with no strings attached. All of them were dominant omegas with strong pheromones. They were fragrant, and by embracing them, he could immerse himself in their sweet scent. In bed, these omegas released pheromones that were more delicious and enticing than anything else.

It was fine for him, even if there was no exchange of emotions. With leisurely sex, Heerak and those omegas could always luxuriate in each other's' dominant pheromones and spend a satisfying night.

Sharing a bed with a beta itself was not the problem. It was not as if he did not know any alphas who had sex with betas before; however, to those alphas, that was just another special delicacy and far from a sincere exchange.

Heerak did not have a special one-time fling with a sober mind—what shocked him was that he had unexpectedly asked a beta to bed

in a drunken stupor.

He couldn't use the "I was seduced by your pheromones" excuse for that night's debacle. There must have been some other reason, or something else he reacted to. There must be something that explained why he randomly hit on a beta while inebriated, but he just couldn't figure out what it was, and that bothered him to no end.

That wasn't the only thing that bothered him. To put it badly, the omegas he spent the night with were all in his social class. Someone might ask if class mattered if it involved a simple hookup, but Heerak would say that they didn't know what they were talking about. He believed that it was a safe bet for birds of a feather to flock together in order to leave no seeds for future trouble.

This time was different.

That beta had nothing to lose even if the events from that night leaked, but Heerak's position was different. If someone were to spread rumors that he devoured an employee after drinking to oblivion, he was sure that the good reputation he worked hard to build would crack.

Seokchan, who was quiet for a while, suddenly threw out a question. "Speaking of which, how did the conversation go?"

"He said he wanted 40,000 won."

Heerak let out a forced laugh.

Seokchan tilted his head and pressed on. "Sorry? 40,000 won?"

"Yeah. Isn't that a riot? He said he's fine, so if anything, he wanted us to split the motel fee."

"Wow, that's…"

Seokchan faltered and glanced at Heerak.

"That's pretty amazing of him."

Heerak briefly recalled the face of the man who demanded 40,000 won from him. He burst out in laughter.

"I think so too."

"In addition to what Manager Moon said about him, when I spoke with him briefly earlier, I got the feeling that Doseon was a decent person. I don't believe that he would be someone who would go around blabbing about that night."

"What are you saying? Do you really want me to just give him 40,000, and leave it at that? Are you kidding me?"

Seokchan grinned sardonically and answered, “I meant that I don’t think there will be any further troubles, so you don’t need to put in more effort to keep him quiet.”

“On what basis? I can’t trust him. I’m going to have to give Mr. Doseon something in the end, no matter what.”

Heerak clicked his tongue.

This left a bad aftertaste. He wanted to tie up the loose ends quickly.

* * *

Heerak walked in silence.

With every step forward, he couldn’t stop the laughter from coming out. He massaged his temples and pursed his lips. It was no use. He smiled wryly.

His secretary’s brief echoed in his head loudly.

“His answer is the same today. Doseon Yoon refuses to meet with you.”

Heerak was in the middle of having lunch with his sister. It was an excellent choice to take the call outside in the hallway. He just could not control the emotions from showing on his face when talking about Doseon.

He couldn’t appreciate his steak at all. Heerak rushed to finish his meal, and as soon as he was done, he told his sister that he had to attend to something urgent and left. He hurried to Hodie.

At Hodie, there was the manager, the employees, and the customers who came and went. There were too many watchful eyes, and he could not underestimate the power of gossip, so it wasn’t the ideal meeting place. However, he needed a place that was segregated from the eyes and attention of others to carry on with the negotiations.

From the information he gathered, Doseon’s day off was Thursday. Heerak ordered Seokchan to arrange a meeting on a Thursday at all costs. Heerak was being considerate, in his own way. He honestly didn’t think that he could carry out a proper discussion by grabbing someone who just got out of work at one in the morning.

Heerak had also pushed back his entire Thursday schedule. He wasn’t sure what time would work best for Doseon, so he freed his

day so he could work with Doseon's schedule.

On his first attempt, Seokchan said, "It didn't go well."

That was quite a shock. He didn't think he would be refused. He was rendered speechless; he just couldn't give up. Heerak instructed Seokchan to keep contacting Doseon until he said yes to a meeting.

Flash forward to Wednesday, the current day.

It was the third time that Seokchan brought news of failure.

Heerak couldn't stand it any longer.

You ignored my invitation three times?! Unbelievable.

It was amazing that he even had the patience to be rejected three times. He thought he was being considerate enough. Now, Heerak was beyond enraged; it felt like the slightest agitation would set him off.

Heerak thought it was a good thing when Seokchan said he was with Doseon at Hodie. He ordered Seokchan to book the VIP room that was almost exclusive to just Heerak, and gave additional instructions for Seokchan to tell Manager Moon and the other employees to not step foot near that room. Seokchan could carry out these instructions easily, but he would not be able to stop the other employees from thinking that something was very off.

None of that mattered to Heerak right now. Just until a few days ago, things like his reputation were very important to him, but now, he couldn't care less about what people thought. He felt like if he did not sit Doseon down to have a few words with him, he would not be able to soothe his rage.

"Doseon Yoon!" Heerak yelled as he burst into the VIP room at the end of the eighth-floor hallway.

"Yes, Executive Director."

Doseon, who was sitting on the couch, stood up and bowed politely, greeting him.

Heerak huffed, catching his breath as the door behind him slammed shut. Although he caught his breath, his anger did not subside. Rather, seeing the other man straighten his back to meet his eyes with such an expressionless face made his rage boil over.

The corners of Heerak's lips curled up in a sneer.

"Do you think you're all that after sleeping with me?" Heerak snarled. He threw those remarks in hopes to utterly crush the other man's expressionless face.

Even so, the other man didn't even flinch.

Doseon only blinked slowly a few times, and then said apologetically, "I'm truly sorry, Executive Director. I don't understand what you mean by that."

Heerak burst out, upset, "You said you'd only take 40,000 won from me!"

As soon as he said that, Heerak groaned.

He was not sure if he was seeing things because his anger blurred his vision, but just then, he saw Doseon make a small smile. The smile lasted less than ten seconds, but it completely threw Heerak off. It was not a malicious sneer or a laugh of ridicule. It was hard to express. He could think of a few words that could describe it, but they were too embarrassing to think about.

"Yes, I did say that," Doseon said slowly, with his poker face back in place. He seemed to think that Heerak was waiting for him to reply.

Heerak was rendered speechless for a moment, and stared blankly at Doseon. The other man seemed to feel the weight of the stare, and lowered his head in response.

That did not sit well with Heerak.

"Th-then, you could have just agreed to meet me!"

What the hell? Did I just stutter? This is driving me crazy, fuck!

Heerak swallowed down his rage. Ever since he met Doseon, he could not control the tone of his voice as well as he would have liked to. He was not able to go from his irritation-filled tone back to his usual pleasant voice like he was previously able to do—and all thanks to the man before him.

"How were you going to collect the money if you didn't meet with me?"

Doseon looked perplexed.

"That's not what I heard from your secretary."

"What do you mean?"

"Secretary Min told me that you wanted to have dinner with me. So I—"

Doseon trailed off mid-sentence and shut his lips, which was a good call. If he had said any more, Heerak's radiant face would have crumbled into despair.

“So, what about it? I could give you the money over dinner. Or do you hate the thought of eating with me so much that it makes you shudder?” Heerak smirked.

Although those words came out of his mouth, he felt what he said was laughable. It was an extremely juvenile thing for him to say.

“Sorry? No, that’s not—”

“If that’s not it, then what is it? It won’t hurt you to have a meal with me.”

He purposely cut off Doseon, and stated what he wanted, his anger helping him ignore what Doseon wanted. He said it to cover his embarrassment from saying something so ridiculous, but this was even more ridiculous than what he said before. He felt like there was something wrong with his head.

Heerak raised his arms and ruffled up his lustrous, light brown hair.

This was all very strange.

This was the first time he felt like this. He could not calm down and maintain his composure easily, like usual. He felt ridiculous, raving about recklessly before this stoic man.

Doseon, who had been silent, asked, “Is that really all right with you, Director?”

“What is?”

“You normally wouldn’t need to dine with a person like me.”

“…”

Heerak was at a loss for words.

He had thought this before, but Doseon had an interesting way of talking. It wasn’t that he sounded like someone with no self-esteem; he spoke in a very matter-of-fact fashion, which added to the strangeness.

After brief contemplation, Heerak grinned and asked, “You’re saying I don’t need to have dinner with a person like you. Is that why you rejected me three times?”

“No, how could I? I didn’t think that you would take it like that.”

“Now you know—better late than never. Just to add to that, do you know what crossed my mind when my secretary told me I was turned down three times? I thought you were upset that I was talking through my secretary, instead of directly to you.”

“No, no. That wasn’t the case at all.”

Heerak slowly smiled in satisfaction inside.

Heerak caught a glimpse of astonishment flashing on Doseon's stony face. That was very much to his liking. He was pleased that he felt like he was finally speaking to a human being.

"I don't know how many times I'm going to ask you out to eat going forward, but next time, you'll have to have a reasonable response or excuse prepared. All right?"

"Yes, I'm sorry."

Doseon bowed as he apologized, and Heerak shook his head in response.

"I didn't say that to make you apologize again," Heerak said as he took a few steps forward.

Doseon slowly straightened his body as he approached him. They exchanged looks, standing at a close distance.

"In any case, I came to talk to you directly, since you rejected my secretary three times. Don't turn me down this time; getting turned down directly from you is going to make me more upset than hearing about it from my secretary."

Heerak insisted.

Doseon bit his lips. He looked like he could not come up with a good response, even though he wanted to say something.

Heerak could not stop the grin from forming on his lips. He probably wouldn't be able to think of anything to say if he were in Doseon's position.

"Have dinner with me."

Heerak placed his hands on Doseon's shoulders.

For a brief moment, he felt that it was too bad that this man was a beta. If he let some of his superdominant pheromones seep out, he would have been able to make the other man tremble and beg to do anything he wanted him to.

"Okay."

The shoulders under his hands stiffened.

Heerak furrowed his brows. He could tell straight away that the man before him was more nervous than he made himself out to be. He could admit that he had said some childish things out of annoyance, but he didn't intend to suffocate the other man under pressure. Not only did the executive director from his workplace

push to meet with him one-on-one in a closed space, he went on an angry rampage—anyone would react like Doseon.

Heerak clicked his tongue and thought for a moment.

Heerak lifted his right arm from Doseon's shoulder. He brought up his index finger and thumbs to Doseon's cheeks and pinched it lightly.

"It would've been nice if you answered my secretary like this."

Oh, this again.

The small smile that he caught a glimpse of a few minutes ago flashed on Doseon's face again. That smile was so tantalizing.

"Now that I've brought it up, let's go right now. I can't wait until tomorrow."

"I'm sorry. That's a bit difficult for me, Director."

Heerak looked like he wanted to ask if Doseon was turning him down again.

As he met those displeased eyes, Doseon hesitated before uttering, "I have been waiting here since I came to work; I still have to work today. I can't just leave."

Heerak scoffed. "So what? Of all people, I invited you out. Nobody will say anything ."

"That's why I'll be in a tight position."

Heerak laughed lightly.

He could understand where Doseon was coming from. He knew very well that he was putting him in a difficult position. He didn't want to ignore that, but he also didn't want to back down.

"But I'm really hungry now. I got so angry from being turned down three times that I barely ate anything for lunch. I thought I was going to get an upset stomach," Heerak whispered quietly.

"Once again, I'm really sorry."

Heerak grabbed the other man's shoulders to prevent him from bowing down again.

Doseon threw a surprised look his way.

Heerak met his eyes firmly, and commanded, "Come with me. Let's go eat."

Doseon could only blink wordlessly.

Heerak said nothing more. He stared at the other man's composed face.

The silent room was soon filled with Heerak's laughter. He could not help but laugh after seeing the other man nod.

* * *

When he came to the realization, it was too late to turn back. Before he knew it, the power imbalance in their relationship seemed to have reversed.

Heerak seemed overeager to have dinner with Doseon, even though sitting at the table was more of a means to start negotiations, not for the purpose of eating and relaxing. It was too late for him to change his mind, so he tried to move on.

He was sure that the reason nobody was on the eighth floor where the VIP room was located in was due to his trusty secretary. Heerak could act more recklessly because there were no watchful eyes. Thanks to that, he could pull the reluctant Doseon by his wrist, and safely make it to the basement parking garage.

It was 4:00 in the afternoon; a bit early for dinner.

He successfully pushed Doseon into the passenger seat, and thought it would be nice to take a drive around the block to pass time.

Heerak took a peek at the man sitting next to him. Doseon was staring straight ahead, his face like stone. His shoulders and neck were always upright from good posture, but now they looked like they were frozen.

Heerak hadn't been able to control his pheromones from getting worked up after Seokchan's call. The dense scent that he exuded in his anger lingered in the car.

He realized once again that Doseon was indeed a beta. If he were an omega, he would already be gasping and wetting himself, but Doseon retained his signature expressionless face. He was completely free from the effects of superdominant pheromones. It still felt fascinating that a beta was sitting beside him in his car.

"Now that I think about it," Heerak cleared his throat and spoke. He could feel Doseon turn his head slightly in his direction. "I thought work started at 6:00 P.M. for you."

"Yes, you're right."

"Did you come in early because of me? I feel bad now."

Doseon was reluctant to reply. Heerak nodded at him to encourage him, and Doseon finally moved his lips.

“Secretary Min told me he would come to my house if I didn’t show up for dinner.”

“Why!?”

“As soon as I turned down the invitation, Secretary Min said that he couldn’t be considerate anymore, and that he would kneel and beg in front of my house if he needed to.”

Seokchan really tried everything.

Heerak smiled wryly and gripped his handle arder.

“I was extremely surprised,” Doseon explained.

“True, I would be too.”

“I told Secretary Min that he didn’t need to, that I’d meet him in person. I asked where he was, and he said that he was at Hodie, so I said I would go there.”

In any case, Seokchan’s desperate pleas were heard. It was thanks to him that this beta was sitting next to him. Heerak decided that he would treat his secretary for his hard work with a nice meal or alcohol.

“What kind of food do you like? Is there anything you want to eat?”

“I’m fine with anything.”

“What about things you dislike or avoid?”

“I’m happy with eating whatever you want.”

Heerak burst out into laughter. Doseon gave him a puzzled look, but Heerak paid no mind. The smile on Heerak’s lips lingered for a while.

It seemed like he was just very unlucky that day.

The atmosphere was too formal, even considering the power imbalance between an executive director and employee. Stone seemed to drip from Doseon’s face and tone.

This was probably just this man’s personality. Since a person’s character did not change so suddenly, Doseon most likely kept up this tough attitude that night as well.

What was it? What compelled Heerak to sleep with this kind of person?

Suddenly, a scene from that night came to mind.

It was the image of Doseon underneath him, the nape of his neck flushed red. As he peered down in his delirious state, Heerak thought that it was cute. If they were facing each other, he might have impulsively kissed him.

He would probably never be able to remember all of the memories that were wiped away that night. It was useless to continue blaming alcohol for it. There remained a couple things that he was still uneasy about. Putting aside the fact that he had sex, Heerak was itching to know what led up to that point. When he came to, he was already deep inside this man's hole. That would have only been possible if he got turned on by this man.

Oh, speaking of which.

As he combed through his thoughts, Heerak let out a groan. Doseon looked his way, curious as to why the thus-far-silent director groaned.

"I was panicked this whole time, so I wasn't thinking straight."

"Sorry?"

"It's a bit late to ask, but… no, it might be pointless to ask, but I'll ask anyway."

"All right."

"Were you all right after that night?"

"Sorry? What do you mean?"

"What do you think? I'm talking about your body. Were you hurt anywhere? You said I was your first."

Doseon, who was listening quietly, let out a faint gasp. He blinked a couple times, as if he finally understood what Heerak meant.

"I wasn't hurt anywhere. I was really all right."

Heerak let out a deep sigh.

"There's no way you would be all right. Based on what little I remember, I just did whatever I wanted to do."

This man was a beta.

Unlike omegas, he did not react to alpha pheromones. Alpha pheromones would not make the deepest parts of him get wet. Pleasure was probably not the only thing Doseon felt by having an alpha, blinded with desire, shove his member deep inside.

Did he even use enough lubrication? No, that didn't seem likely. In his drunk state, he mistook him for an omega. Then, what if he just started to poke about without any foreplay? Thinking back on

how difficult it was to get in that night, it seemed more and more likely that this was how that night played out.

Heerak turned pale. He must have been in so much pain.

This was not the kind of thought he should be having while driving. He decided to stop thinking about it, for now. He felt a curious look in his direction, but Heerak kept his eyes on the road. If he tried to say anything now, he felt like he would blurt out some outrageous nonsense.

Headline: The drunk executive director, Heerak Cho, invited a man to bed.

That alone was a problem, if it leaked.

"He seduced me, so I slept with him, but he had no manners in bed. He just shoved his way inside me, and my body couldn't take it. I cried out in agony while he was shoving it in, but the director didn't even listen. Since he was black-out drunk and not thinking straight, he paid no attention to my pleas."

Everything about this situation was problematic. If this also leaked, wouldn't this be the worst-case scenario?

His head throbbed.

Heerak massaged his temples and let out a sigh.

What did Seokchan say? He said this man didn't seem like someone who needed to be silenced. Heerak strongly denied that in front of his secretary, but deep inside, he could agree to some part of it. While Seokchan made that judgment based on a first impression, Heerak made his determination after observing how this situation unfolded over time.

If Doseon intended to use this incident to earn a quick buck, his attitude didn't make sense. If he considered this to be a fantastic opportunity and approached the drunk director, he would not have asked for just 40,000 won when Heerak offered to give him anything. Moreover, Heerak had to pressure Doseon to give him a number, and he reluctantly gave it to him.

Even so, he kept imagining the worst-case scenario. He could not help it.

"There's nobody in this world who could reject your advances, Executive Director."

The first time he heard that, it was so unexpected that he burst out laughing. Thinking back on it now, he could not just laugh about

it anymore. When he thought through that night's events logically, not being able to refuse his advances could not be the only reason for sleeping with him. It just couldn't be.

Therefore, he thought that this stone-faced man had some sort of ulterior motive. Doseon's calm and composed face could just be a façade. Turning down his dinner invitation three times could be a scheme to get Heerak to sleep with him again. As soon as that thought crossed his mind, he let out a scoff.

"It feels like I've become paranoid or something," Heerak muttered.

Doseon, who was sitting up straight, responded, "Excuse me, Director? Did you say something to me?"

"No, it's nothing. Just talking to myself."

After aimlessly circling around, they arrived at their destination. Even though he had asked what Doseon liked, the location was as good as decided.

They entered the Italian restaurant that Seokchan made a reservation for earlier. The staff guided them into a private room, where the two sat across from each other. Silence hung in the air between them.

Heerak carefully observed the other's rigid face. Doseon did not seem like he even wanted to look at Heerak, and he focused on the small vase on the table instead. Heerak could now observe the other man as much as he wanted to.

Doseon Yoon was 34; surprisingly, he was older than Heerak. He had worked at Hodie for five months, and his parents were middle-class betas. His only sibling was a sister who was three years his elder, and he lived without experiencing many hardships, and nothing about him stood out.

Heerak had only read the first page of the documents handed over to him by his secretary; just reading the first page was enough. It seemed like there would be more trivial and detailed information behind the front page, but Heerak did not feel the need to read it. Doseon lived a life that could be summarized in a few sentences. In Heerak's view, he had lived a peaceful and boring life.

Dinner came first.

There was a lot that he wanted to talk about, but he decided that they should eat first. It wasn't really the best topic for a dinner

conversation. As the plates in front of them were swapped out, Heerak stuffed his mouth with food as if he were completing a mission.

Heerak felt uncomfortable as they continued to dine in silence. It did not look like Doseon was going to start talking any time soon, and Heerak thought that he at least should engage in small talk, but that was harder than expected. The casual jokes that he could usually throw in did not come out at all.

"Do you like the food?" he was finally able to ask.

Why was it so difficult for him to come up with that? If he needed to wring out his brain just to think of something to say, he must have felt more anxious about the situation than he expected.

"Yes, it's delicious. Thank you for asking," Doseon nodded and answered quietly.

"That's good to hear."

After that, they exchanged some more small talk.

Heerak could not tell what exactly he was eating, but as he continued the conversation, the meal was quickly over. Finally, after all the dishes were taken away, they were served coffee.

The real conversation could start now.

No more staff were going to frequent their room. Heerak felt like he could now say the things he was reluctant to say while they were eating. Of course, it didn't seem like the questions would come out any easier. He felt a bit unsettled that he would have to ask questions that were both unbecoming of him and borderline sexual harassment, to get to the bottom of what really happened that night.

"Mr. Doseon."

"Yes, Director."

"There were some things that I couldn't ask properly because I missed the chance, and I was quite flustered. Some of my questions might be difficult to answer, so I'll apologize in advance."

Unlike Heerak's grimace, Doseon looked composed from the beginning.

"No problem. Feel free to ask anything."

Heerak grabbed for the glass of ice water instead of the coffee. Strangely, his throat felt parched.

"Even if you say you were fine and not in pain anywhere, I think differently. That entire time I, uh…"

Do I really have to go this far?

Heerak exhaled deeply, and continued to string his words together with some difficulty. “I keep thinking that I wouldn’t have done things properly while I was that drunk. I wouldn’t have worried about this if you were an omega, but that’s not the case here. If you were hurt anywhere because I forced myself on you, be honest, and please tell me.”

Doseon, who was listening quietly, shook his head gently. “Not at all. You were very kind to me.”

There was no hint of hesitation on his face. He also did not look like he was lying. Heerak narrowed his eyes and asked, “Was I?” to confirm.

“Yes you were, don’t worry.”

“I still can’t really believe that. There’s no way you would have been able to eat mine— no, that’s not what I wanted to say.”

Some vulgar words almost slipped out without him noticing. Heerak shook his head hard and cleared his throat.

Doseon spoke up then. “By any chance, did you want to know how you were able to penetrate me?”

He couldn’t be happier that the other had said it first. He was not any less thrown off by the matter-of-fact way Doseon stated it, but it was a good thing he could at least continue the conversation smoothly.

Heerak laughed hollowly and affirmed. “Yes, That’s exactly what I want to know.”

“Penetration was a bit difficult at first. I was nervous, and I thought it would hurt quite a bit if you just shoved it in. While I was flustered, there happened to be some lotion on the vanity, so I used that as a temporary lubricant. I used the lotion to unskillfully stretch my—”

Heerak waved his hands around and cut him off. “Stop, stop! I get it.”

He could not bear to hear the explicit description any further. He could usually laugh off most lecherous conversations, but this time was a bit difficult. Even though his face was crumbling in embarrassment, Doseon maintained his placid face, to the point that it irritated Heerak to no end.

Since he could not remember anything, he had no choice but to take this explanation as the truth. Rather than completely believing him, it was more correct to say that he was just overlooking it. No matter how much he loosened himself up with lotion, there was no way that it would not have hurt, and that troubled him.

He could not stop here.

He had so many more questions to ask.

He had so many questions, he wondered if he could ask all of them today.

However, now that he was trying to recall them, he drew a blank.

Heerak leaned on the table with his elbow, and massaged his forehead again. His phone, set beside his water glass, came into sight. One of the questions he was dying to ask popped into his head.

"Doseon Yoon."

"Yes."

"I'm going to ask you, but don't feel hurt by it. I really just want to confirm one thing."

Doseon nodded. "Okay, ask me anything."

Although he was not sure he needed to go this far, it didn't change the fact that this was an obstacle he needed to overcome.

"Is there something I should be worried about that is saved on your phone?" Heerak asked in a low, unwilling voice.

"What do you mean exactly?"

"I'm talking about photos or videos."

His lips opened then came to a slow close. Because he was intently watching all of Doseon's movements,

Heerak froze unconsciously.

He did not want to believe that Doseon's lips did not give him the no that he so wanted to hear.

What the hell?

The forced smile on Heerak's beautiful face slowly grew frigid.

He felt terrible.

It was laughable, but he also somehow felt betrayed.

Even though he yelled at Seokchan that he couldn't trust Doseon, Heerak must have thought subconsciously that it wasn't possible for Doseon to be hiding something from him. Despite talking about how he made a memory he would treasure for his lifetime, maybe

secretly, Doseon wanted to use evidence from that night to extort him for money.

Doseon seemed to notice the change in Heerak's expression. "Are you asking me if I have pictures of you on my phone?"

Doseon asked this in a composed tone, but Heerak could hear the hesitation in his voice. Heerak clicked his tongue, annoyed. There was no way he would enjoy the reason behind the hesitation coming off of that question; Doseon could not give a clear no. There was only one conclusion —Doseon probably wanted to bring it up after testing the waters, and making sure he had the upper hand. Heerak could only think that Doseon was taken aback by the fact that he brought up the pictures first.

Heerak asked again, sharply, "Do you have pictures of me?"

After a brief pause, Doseon answered, sounding glum, "Yes, I do, but—"

He couldn't take it any longer. Heerak yelled, "What? You do? Wow! Fantastic!"

Good thing he asked. That was a close call.

He wanted nothing more than to immediately call up Seokchan and shout, *"A decent person, my ass. He's definitely a jerk!"*

Heerak attempted to cool his head by gulping down cold water while Doseon bowed and apologized. "I'm sorry. I didn't think to do that, but I should have erased them."

As he slammed the glass on the table, Heerak's fine fingers flinched.

He should have erased them?

This was unexpected.

Doubt soon replaced the anger that was ablaze in his eyes.

Heerak stared at the man on the other side. The deadpan expression was coming apart. That, he liked. His constantly blank expression looked shaken up, and that was probably not an illusion that stemmed from a misunderstanding.

"Well, let me see the pictures."

"Okay, not a problem."

Doseon quickly swiped his pattern to unlock his phone, and then handed it over to Heerak.

Heerak quickly found the photo gallery. There were only three or four folders, and not a lot of pictures in any of them. This was a

massive difference compared to his own phone, which had hundreds of photos in various folders. It was a shock to see a photo gallery with no selfies at all. He couldn't help but scoff at the shoddy gallery, filled with screenshots of subway schedules and maps.

Oh, hang on.

He felt his head spin.

As he opened folders here and there to see where his photo was, he finally found himself looking in a folder labeled "Downloads."

Hold on, these are…

There were about three photos of him. After swiping through each picture, Heerak became stiff. He couldn't move a single muscle. "Mr. Yoon."

"Yes?"

"Are these the photos of me that you mentioned?"

Heerak shoved the screen in front of Doseon.

Doseon glanced down to confirm and nodded. "That's right."

Heerak let out a deep sigh of relief and slumped over. His forehead touched the cool surface of the table, but that didn't cool his headache and the heat in his face down.

"Executive Director?" Doseon asked in a worried tone, but despite hearing it, Heerak had no energy to respond. He felt truly drained. A weird groan escaped his throat as the tension suddenly left his body.

A moment later, Heerak sprung back up.

Doseon's shoulders jolted in surprise.

"I was so scared!"

Doseon looked at him with puzzled eyes and tilted his head. "Sorry?"

"You said you had pictures of me so I—wow, I thought you meant that you took pictures of me dead drunk, and lying around naked on the motel bed!"

"You thought that I would take a picture of you sleeping, without your consent…?"

Heerak felt a sting of guilt, but he hid it successfully and retorted, "I never said that! I didn't say I thought you took pictures of me. I only asked if you had them. But imagine how I felt when you said you did have pictures."

He said, like he was making a long list of excuses. Heerak felt a bit hurt, but he had no other choice right now. It was momentary, but it

was good that this was a misunderstanding.

"I never did such a thing."

"That's a relief to hear… but wait." Heerak sat up straight and lowered his eyes to the phone in his hands. He tapped the dimming screen before the phone locked itself to make it bright again. Heerak's radiant smile filled the screen. "So, did you download these pictures?"

Doseon hesitated a bit and said yes in a very quiet voice.

"Why?"

Then, Doseon smiled faintly and answered, "I feel better when I look at them."

The smile disappeared in a few seconds, as it always did. His face became impassive as if he never smiled, which displeased Heerak immensely. His brows furrowed unconsciously.

Doseon seemed to misread the change and rushed to add, "Sorry, I'll erase them immediately."

"No, no. That's, well…" Heerak dragged out his words. "You don't have to erase those, alright? I won't force you to erase those. Those aren't the kind of pictures that I expected to find anyways. These pictures are fine for you to keep."

Thankfully, Doseon seemed to understand. As he continued to talk in his anxiety-filled voice, Doseon's face visibly softened.

"Will that really be fine? I don't want to cause trouble for you, Director," Doseon mumbled very quietly.

"It's fine. Why would it cause trouble? There's no way that it would."

"I thought that you might be uncomfortable if the one-night stand you wanted to forget about kept pictures of you. I can understand if you feel unsettled about this. My apologies."

If someone else had said this, Heerak would think that they were being sarcastic. But from the few exchanges they had, Heerak could easily tell that Doseon did not intend to say that with sarcasm.

Even so, it did not feel great to hear. Something about it did not sit well with him. A corner of his heart beat slightly.

"Don't erase them," he blurted out without thinking. Heerak was surprised at himself, and he quickly added more to it. "You said you feel better when you see my pictures."

Doseon nodded firmly a couple times. "You're right, I do."

“I appreciate hearing that. Thank you.” Heerak winked and said in a playful manner, “Let’s end this discussion here then. Is that fine with you?”

“Yes.”

Heerak felt completely washed out after overcoming this hurdle. He forgot all the questions he meant to ask, and even if he squeezed his brain dry, he did not think he could remember them.

Heerak stared intently at the expressionless face that was avoiding his gaze. In his mind, he tried to recall the short flashes of memory from that night. The first thing that came to mind were the flushed ears after he interlocked their fingers. The tingling feeling that he felt then was still fresh on his mind as well. He started to wonder if maybe he liked people with a certain fresh charm about them.

As he was reminiscing about that night, Heerak suddenly let out a short, “Ah, Mr. Yoon.”

Doseon lifted his head in response to his name, and their eyes met. “Yes?”

“That night, I asked if we were having consensual sex. Remember? Right after I asked if it was rape.”

The squirming lips couldn’t give an answer straight away. It was a similar situation to that night. Heerak was thinking that it was strange when he heard a soft, “Yes.”

Heerak asked, in the lightest tone possible, to avoid making it seem like he was interrogating the other man. “You answered immediately when I asked if it was sexual assault, but when I asked if it was consensual, you hesitated, like now. You remember that too?”

“Yes.”

“Why did you hesitate?”

After a moment of thinking, Doseon answered carefully. “Because it wasn’t completely consensual. You were drunk. You didn’t know who exactly your partner was. If you think about it, I used this situation to my advantage.” There was a pause. “I apologize again, Executive Director.”

This last part was so quiet that he had to strain his ears to hear.

His mood dampened. Heerak felt an unexplainable bitterness, and found himself looking for some more cold water.

It was the same as the last time. Doseon used every opportunity to apologize again and again. Heerak felt like the reasons for which Doseon was apologizing were logical, but he felt like this was becoming a complete mess again.

There was one thing for certain though.

Heerak did not like this situation at all.

He especially did not want to hear another apologetic whisper from Doseon. If he heard one more apology, he felt like his insides would churn.

"Did you give it a second thought?" Heerak decided to change the topic.

In a way, he pretty much brought up the main issue to resolve. He did not ask that question with the intention of turning the atmosphere heavy. He would rather quickly resolve the problem than try to remember all the questions he wanted to ask.

"What do you mean?"

"Is there anything you want from me? Anything you wish for?"

"There's nothing that I can think of."

Heerak scoffed. He was ready this time. "Just 40,000 won and memories. There's a limit to how low of a pit to throw me into."

Doseon looked a bit surprised and his eyes widened. "Excuse me?"

"Ask for more." Before Doseon could respond, Heerak quickly continued. "When you say you only want 40,000 won from me for that one night, doesn't that also imply that that night with me was only worth 40,000 won to you?"

The other man's face became flustered in embarrassment. It was a good sight to see. "Director, that's not what I—"

"If not, then what? That's why you should ask for more. Please just do that, for the sake of my inner peace."

Doseon's eyes shook for a moment, but then he answered resolutely. "I'm really sorry, Director, but I can't do that."

"Why not?"

"I don't think I could stand myself if I received anything material from you. Even now, I can't think of that night in a merely positive light. It's because of the reason I said just a moment ago. If I receive something from you, I think I will feel like complete trash. Please reconsider this, Director." Doseon bowed down deeply. "I'm truly

sorry to cause you any trouble because of my impulsive decision. But I'm going to act like I did not hear that offer."

He received another apology.

Then, Heerak said in a tone that he could only describe as extremely irritated. "Then what if I just shoved money in your paycheck? What are you going to do about it?"

Doseon replied without hesitation. "Then I will ask my manager to return it, and I will quit my job at Hodie."

"Wow." Heerak laughed hollowly, exhaling like a balloon losing air.

If Doseon quit his job at Hodie, it would not be good for Heerak . He needed to keep Doseon within his sight to keep watch over him to see if he tried something funny. Nothing would make him more anxious than if Doseon suddenly disappeared from his radar.

"I get it. I understand everything you said. But since you're drawing the line, I have no choice." Heerak muttered in a dry tone. "Doseon, I need to tell you something."

His transparent face became extremely frigid. His cold eyes looked straight at the face of the man sitting across from him.

"Doseon, it might be easy for you to avoid feeling like trash, but your rejection will make me extremely worn out. Now, and in the future."

Doseon could not seem to be able to keep a straight face anymore either. His composed expression seemed to waver t. "I'm very sorry."

At that, Heerak raised his voice in his answer. "Stop apologizing."

"Director—"

"Look at the state of this situation. How do you think I feel when you apologize like that? I would only think, 'Why would you do something that you'd be sorry for?'" He said that to make himself feel better, but after those words left his mouth, he felt worse. Heerak tousled up his hair and sighed.

No more words came from either man. The silence in the room was deafening.

Heerak hung his head, looking very solemn, and glanced up. What he saw made his eyes widen.

Doseon's face was stiff as always. That was not what surprised him.

What caught Heerak's attention was the color around Doseon's eyes. When he saw the red rims around Doseon's eyes, Heerak's mind went blank with shock. The other man was not crying, but it looked like he was trying desperately to suppress his emotions. Even though Heerak was observing it from a distance, he could finally see how Doseon was feeling.

I'm the one who wants to cry here! he yelled on the inside. He felt pretty upset now.

Instead of conforming to his inner thoughts, Heerak stood up from his seat, the chair making a noise as it was pushed back. Across the table, Doseon was glaring intently at his cup, but at the noise, he lifted his chin in surprise.

Heerak approached Doseon. He pushed lightly down on Doseon's shoulder, who was rising from his seat in surprise, and sat him back down. "What I said just now was a bit harsh. I'm sorry."

It was a sincere apology.

That surprised even Heerak himself.

Throughout his professional life, Heerak did not have the habit of apologizing for everything. The first thing that came to his mind when he saw Doseon's eyes and pallid face was that he should probably apologize. The next thought was that he was the one who wanted to cry more. He slapped himself for using a sharp tone in his burst of anger. He even regretted snapping at Doseon.

"No, I'm the one who's sorry."

Heerak patted Doseon's shoulder, as if to comfort the other man. He didn't know if this was just a feeling, but the more he touched, the stiffer Doseon's shoulders grew. Maybe the sudden contact made the other man nervous. Although he thought that, it wasn't easy to take his hands off him. Rather, he even thought that he wanted to rub the other man's shoulders until they became soft and loose.

Heerak laughed to himself.

Right at this moment, he felt a tingling sensation similar to the time when they interlocked fingers, although less intense.

The ups and downs of his emotions were drastic today, and it was all because of this one man .

After his outburst, he was at a loss as to what he should do. This emotional roller coaster was novel to him. He had never felt like this

before with another person. It was novel, but it was also quite unnerving.

The mood in the room signaled to Heerak that further discussion was impossible.

The two got up from the table. Doseon looked like he wanted to return to Hodie and go back to work. Of course, Heerak replied with "I'll drop you off at your place." He was firm, despite the complaints from Doseon. The unyielding attitude of the executive director eventually made Doseon oblige.

"Oh!" Heerak exclaimed as he took one more glance back at the table before they left.

Doseon's cell phone was still on the table.

He let out a laugh. He was completely in over his head, but it seemed like the other man was too. He picked up the phone and turned. His eyes fell on Doseon's back.

Heerak peered down for a moment. After looking at it in close proximity, he could overlap this image with that from that night.

"Doseon."

Heerak reached out and grabbed the other's wrist. Under his palm, he could feel the other man tremble slightly. He slowly turned his head to look up. Heerak lifted his eyes from the man's nape onto the other man's gaze.

"Director?"

"I just thought of a question, so I'll ask."

"Okay."

"You didn't want your face to be seen that night. Why?"

If the answer was "I was feeling shy," or "I felt embarrassed," Heerak thought he would feel his heart tug a bit. His spine would've tingled if he'd heard the voice say any of those phrases that night.

However, Doseon was truly an unpredictable man.

After a pause, the answer he got was completely out of the options he could foresee.

"I can't really say with certainty. I think I was feeling a bit guilty and anxious."

"Anxious? Guilty?" Heerak echoed back in a blank tone.

"That night, I felt like I was in a dreamlike state. So if I met eyes with you, I… I thought that this whole turn of events would just end. I also felt guilty that I couldn't refuse you in a moment of selfishness.

At that time, there were a lot of thoughts going through my head. And that's why it was hard for me to look into your eyes; my thoughts were chaotic."

As he said all of that, Doseon's tone was very dry. His voice was not monotonous because he was composed, but because he was nervou . The short sighs he let out between his words made his tone uneven.

Before I even knew it, I ended up paying attention to his voice.

Heerak chuckled to himself.

Trying to analyze each and every word that another person said to find out how they were feeling was very new to him. It was so unfamiliar to him that it made him shudder.

"That's not very nice to hear," Heerak said after a brief silence.

"Sorry, maybe I shouldn't have said—"

"No, no. Not because of you, it's because of me. I feel like shit." Heerak rubbed his lips with his left hand, and squeezed the wrist still in his right hand.

Why do I feel like crap?

The answer to that was simple.

Objectively speaking, Heerak did not think that he had such a good-natured personality. He hated things that were exhausting, and he refused to do things that were bothersome. He showed an open and outgoing personality because he needed to make himself well-known, but he could not change his true self.

He thought so even now.

Considering his normal self, this whole thing was completely ridiculous. If he were really worried about Doseon spreading rumors, he could hire someone to watch him, and have that person report every little detail to Seokchan. He did not really need to insist on arranging a meeting over dinner, that in itself was strange for him to want to do.

It was upsetting that outrageous things kept happening one after another. He felt like he kept being thrown into unpredictable events that he had no control over. There was no way he would feel good about any of this. He could not welcome a life where he felt like he lost control.

On top of that…

Heerak looked down and stared at the back of Doseon's head. His eyes trailed down to Doseon's slightly drooping shoulders, and then to the wrist that was still in his grasp. The skin in his hands felt strangely cold. He wasn't sure if it was because Doseon's body temperature was low or because he was nervous.

None of those things mattered right now.

The most important thing was that Heerak had no idea why he was still holding onto Doseon's hand.

Doseon said so himself: It wasn't sexual assault.

When Heerak asked the question while moving his hips in pleasure, and when he confirmed it again with his heart pounding in his chest, both times he felt relieved when he heard the answer.

But was that really the case?

Doseon had said it was just a good memory and that he was grateful for having it. He also said that that was enough for him as compensation. However, that was the biggest reason why Heerak felt so upset.

Heerak didn't think that kind of thing could ever become a nice memory.

That night, he was the only person who felt good. The man in front of him talked about feeling guilt and anxiety when he recalled that night; these two things hurt his pride the most. He must not have made him feel very good that night. His mood hit rock bottom. If anyone were to ask any of the omegas that Heerak slept with, none of them would say anything like what Doseon said.

At this point, Heerak smiled mockingly to himself.

I really have no patience at all. I guess I can't do anything about my true nature.

If he just let go of this thought, this painfully annoying thought, that was that. Then he could end this entire thing without saying this one last thing to this man.

However, he had to say it.

"Doseon"

"Yes?"

It was easier said than done.

He couldn't stand it, so he put to words what came across his mind. "Now, I'm going to say some absolute nonsense, so if you don't

like it, just say so. I'm just saying this just so it doesn't sound like I'm forcing this on you."

"Yes, what is it?"

"Do it again with me—sex."

The calm face stirred. Doseon looked up at Heerak's radiant face, searching for an answer. Heerak erased his smile and instead, with as sincere a face that he could muster, he looked down at Doseon.

Doseon, who kept clenching and opening his fist in anxiety, managed to open his mouth. "What you said just now, are you being serious?"

Doseon sounded like he couldn't believe what Heerak had said at all.

Heerak softly grinned at him, and answered in a low voice that was almost a whisper, "Doseon, that's what you said you asked that day. My answer is the same as that time."

"But just now, you said you were going to say nonsense."

"Well, that's right. I'm being completely serious, but you might take it differently. You think it's absurd and even laughable." Heerak put in a few jokes as he said that, but Doseon didn't react, let alone move. His face became sullener, and Heerak could not say anything more.

"If you want to do it with me—" After a moment of silence, Doseon answered as if he wanted to double check with Heerak.

At that, Heerak quickly answered, "I do want to."

"Then…" Doseon trailed off, but his face was still stiff. Heerak could never tell what Doseon was thinking under this expressionless face. He wasn't sure if Doseon himself knew that this caused a lot of anxiety for others. "I'm fine with it, too."

That was the answer he expected. But at the same time, he was still shocked.

The fact that he thought Doseon would accept his offer was mostly because Heerak was putting on a tough front. Because he had never asked anyone for sex before, he just wanted to console himself by believing that nobody would dare turn him down.

However, despite his tough façade, he was anxious. To begin with, he was just blurting out whatever came to mind. He was extremely worried that this would just end up with him ultimately gaining nothing from being rejected, after spouting a bunch of bullshit.

“Let’s get going.”

There were many times he had regretted his past actions, but not this time. Rather than regret, he felt relief.

Heerak pulled the man by his wrist. Doseon followed without hesitation.

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II

His brain was a mess.

He wasn't sure if that really fit the situation, but in any case, Heerak felt like he completely forgot how to have sex.

The restaurant they were dining in was inside a hotel, so he could have easily booked a suite without changing locations. Normally, he would have done that straight away. It wasn't that he didn't want to be seen with a beta at a bustling hotel front; his mind simply went blank.

He had no idea why he felt so urgent. For some reason, his insides churned, and he broke out into a cold sweat. He even couldn't remember how he managed to drive. Hundreds of questions endlessly filled his head, and unnerved him.

Why was that the only thing he was able to say back there? And why did this man agree without any complaints?

It was all very strange.

He didn't feel this disoriented when he warned Doseon that he was going to say nonsense, or when he actually spit those words out. It was when he grabbed Doseon's wrist and dragged him out that his heart started hammering against his chest. He was frustrated that he did not know why his heart was beating like mad.

Silence filled the car as Heerak drove them to his home.

He did not think to chat at all, and as always, Doseon didn't speak up first. His mind so chaotic, Heerak failed to notice the suffocating silence that permeated the car.

He was able to calm down somewhat when they got into his personal elevator, which would take them up to Heerak's penthouse. He felt like he could finally breathe when he stepped into a familiar space.

"Director, shall I take a shower first?" Doseon asked, calmly looking around the apartment.

Heerak felt a bit hurt at that. Here he was, his heart beating wildly, his head a mess, and not composed at all. He felt a flood of anger when he saw Doseon so composed. It sounded to him like Doseon was saying, “We’re going to do it anyway, so let’s get it over with.” Heerak found it ridiculous that, in this very moment, there wasn’t even a pea-sized fraction of a mood from him.

“I have to clean up anyway, so let’s get in together,” Heerak responded purposely, with a mischievous smile. He wasn’t trying to be tough this time; he just wanted Doseon to be as thrown off as Heerak was.

“Oh, okay. If that is what you wish, Director, I’ll do that.”

Trying to shock Doseon ended in failure.

Heerak could not smile or laugh this time.

He was at a loss for words after hearing Doseon respond in his composed manner, with seemingly no emotions, nor any room for feelings. Heerak wanted to know what he needed to do to see surprise or a broad smile on that face.

His penthouse had three bathrooms, but Heerak decided that he did not need to mention that for now. He mentioned going into the shower together half as a joke, but once he said it, he had a mind to act on it. If they were both naked and their bare skin touched, maybe Doseon would react differently.

However, that did not go as easily as he imagined.

Doseon did not show a hint of change while he was taking his clothes off in front of the bathroom that Heerak led them to, and he moved without hesitation as he removed each article of clothing with that blank face of his. Heerak was the one whose fair face became splotchy with red while restlessly taking off his suit beside Doseon.

As they waited for the bathtub, big enough to fit three to four adults to be filled with water, Doseon calmly looked around the bathroom. Heerak fixed his eyes on the gushing stream of water, taking quick peeks at the standing man. For some reason, he felt like he was peeping on someone that he shouldn’t be looking at.

This was a beta’s body.

Doseon was the first beta he saw naked, but he could definitely feel that his body was different from that of an omega. Normally, Heerak’s nose would be tickled with captivating and sensual pheromones in this situation. The fact that Doseon was maintaining

his composure despite being in a space completely filled with alpha pheromones was proof that he was a beta.

The most basic foreplay before sex was sampling each other's pheromones. At least, that was what Heerak thought. This situation, in which there was no point in releasing his pheromones as the other man couldn't feel a single dose, felt unfamiliar and awkward. It felt so foreign that he thought that this might be why he was partly out of his mind with frustration.

Doseon may remember Heerak's nude body, but this was the first time Heerak saw the other's while sober. Heerak was able to gather new pieces of information from stealing glances at him. Doseon had a strictly average body, though he was slim with no blemishes. It was nowhere near the well-tended body of Heerak, but it was clear to Heerak that Doseon had good proportions.

The tub was finally full when Heerak sneakily scanned Doseon's body up and down. He entered first and motioned for Doseon to join him, and the latter obliged.

Heerak had never visited a public bathhouse or sauna before, but sitting in his tub with Doseon, he wondered if this was how it felt like to be at one. Heerak contemplated this somewhat barren situation—they didn't exchange conversation, they sat with some distance between each other, and sat there silently, warming themselves up with the hot water

Eventually, Heerak burst out laughing.

His laugh echoed in the bathroom, and this time, Doseon's expression changed. Doseon, startled by the burst of laughter, widened his eyes and blinked. That only made Heerak laugh harder.

"Isn't this silly? In about thirty minutes or so, we're going to be in bed together, but what's with this mood?"

He didn't mean to say that out loud. He was only really talking to himself to cope with this awkward situation. However, Doseon looked troubled and murmured, "I'm sorry."

"…"

"I don't know what I can or should say in this kind of situation," he added in a quiet voice. Heerak thought that this side of Doseon was quite cute, and his face was full of smiles as he quickly slid over to Doseon's side.

Their positions changed in an instant. Heerak moved behind him. He pulled his waist toward himself with both arms, and gazed down

at the back of Doseon's neck. Unlike at the restaurant, he was finally able to recognize that his back was the same from that night. Doseon's plump earlobes and slightly skinny shoulders were the only things he recalled. While Heerak was glad that he could get the confirmation that he wanted, Doseon was as still as a rock.

Heerak snickered and whispered, "Lean on me."

Doseon just shook his head a few times. He probably did not intend it, but Heerak welcomed this reaction. This was something he recalled clearly.

It was useless for Doseon to say no. Heerak pulled him closer, and didn't let go until he pressed his back on Heerak's torso. Once he ended up leaning back on Heerak, Doseon's ears slowly tinged pink. Fortunately, it was probably not just because of the warm bath water. Heerak started to enjoy this situation, and felt a bit more relaxed with Doseon in front of him. His chaotic thoughts, which had been running around like a prepubescent boy just a couple hours ago, finally felt like they could function again.

Eventually, the two got out of the bath and relocated to the bedroom.

Heerak wanted to pull his hair out and flip a table, but he pushed that desire down and started talking to Doseon. There was a very important thing he realized far too late.

"Doseon."

"Yes?"

Doseon was lying like a statue in the middle of the wide bed. Heerak laid down beside him and grabbed his shoulders, pulling him to the side. He quickly complied and let himself be pulled, rolling to his side. He met Heerak's eyes .

"I'm sorry."

There was a slight pause before Doseon said, "Sorry? What do you mean?"

"I don't have any condoms here."

"Oh."

There was no reason why Heerak would have condoms at home; he never brought anyone home for a night of sensual passion. His most frequent visitors were his parents, siblings, and Seokchan, and even then, they never entered his bedroom or bathrooms. Even his closest friends weren't allowed to step foot through the front door.

"But do you know what the bigger problem is?"

“Sorry? There was another problem?”

Heerak laughed hollowly. “I don’t have any lube, either. I remember thinking about it right before we got into the car, but at some point, it completely slipped my mind.”

This was something that truly should never have happened by Heerak’s standards, and there was only one reason he mentioned his mistake to Doseon; he wanted to ask for Doseon’s understanding. Just like that night, Doseon would have no choice but to use lotion or another alternative to lube today.

So the next thing Doseon said obviously made Heerak frown. “Director, if not having condoms or lube bothers you, should I go out and buy some?”

Heerak pressed his lips tightly together. He felt something strange and ludicrous would pop out of his mouth, and he wanted to prevent that from happening.

He watched Doseon’s face closely. He felt upset just watching the blinking, unruffled face. “Doseon Yoon.”

“Yes?”

“How could you interpret my apology like that? I really don’t understand you at all!” He raised his voice unintentionally. Doseon was probably surprised at how upset Heerak sounded, as he was anxiously searching Heerak’s face, seeking to soothe him.

“I’m sorry, Director, but that’s the only way I could understand that apology.” Doseon’s response was concise, but Heerak felt himself swell with inexplicable emotions. He could not maintain his composure. To say he could fall over from rage or skyrocketing blood pressure would be appropriate for this situation.

So Doseon thought Heerak was asking him to go out and buy those things in a roundabout manner. He thought Heerak was making an indirect apology. That was how this man interpreted Heerak’s remorse.

“Seriously, what the hell?!” Heerak sighed. He pulled the man into an embrace. He could feel the man in his arms slowly grow stiff, starting from his shoulders, but he ignored it. If anything, he squeezed tighter and said in an angry tone, “How could you think of it like that? That’s just me telling you to laugh at me for fumbling even though I was the one who invited you! It means that I feel awkward telling you that you have no choice but to use lotion like last time! It means that I’m sorry that I was so unprepared, but I will

be ready next time! Why don't you get that? Why are you taking this so seriously?"

Heerak wasn't sure if this was just his feeling, but the shoulders in his arms felt more rigid than before. Heerak clicked his tongue. He sounded more riled up than he previously anticipated. This wasn't even something that he should be this upset over.

"Director."

"What?!" Heerak quickly retorted to the voice that came after some silence. Inside, he knew he slipped up again. Didn't he sound like he was outright enraged now?

It had been a while since he acted like this.

Heerak sounded like a spoiled brat. Putting on a friendly smile and speaking in a gentle tone was his daily practice. He spent every day acting coy and humble out of necessity. The sharp and emotional tone that he had been letting out around Doseon was something he didn't do even when he was an adolescent.

"I don't know if I heard this right."

Was it because he yelled in response? Doseon took his time to say what was on his mind.

"What is it? Just say it," Heerak urged, and decided that he could cooperate for a bit. He took a few deep breaths before answering Doseon in a calm voice.

"Uh, so… are you implying that there will be a next time?" Doeson asked.

It was Heerak's turn to stay quiet.

He felt like he had been one-upped.

After feeling a little stab from being exposed, embarrassment rushed in its place, heating up his face instantly.

When he yelled all that nonsense, he secretly felt relief. He blurted out whatever he wanted in his anger, without giving a damn about the other man to make himself feel better, so he didn't regret this.

If he were to repeat that moment, he was sure he would say that kind of *bullshit* again. This time was the same. He didn't act on his nonsense yet, and it was just a little embarrassing, but he was already looking forward to next time.

There was nothing to gain from being mute any longer.

Heerak answered tersely, "I would like there to be a next time." The shoulders in his arms shook a little. Feeling a bit anxious at the

light tremble, Heerak added quietly, “What do you think, Doseon?”

The answer came quicker than expected. “If you want it, Director, I’m happy with that too,” Doseon quickly added. He seemed to have replied because he felt rushed to give an answer. His lips squirmed tentatively, unable to form words, before he whispered quietly, “However—”

The end of his words dwindled. His voice died away, as if he did not intend to continue his sentence. Heerak pressed on by asking, “However?” pushing him to continue.

“Wouldn’t there not be next time?”

“Why not?”

“Just because…” Heerak could hear a hint of laughter in Doseon’s voice. “I’m not sure why, but I just had that thought.”

The vague voice dissipated into the air in an instant.

Heerak didn’t press on. It would be pathetic for Heerak to tell Doseon off for saying something ridiculous or to keep questioning him why he thought that. Doseon too did not say it while expecting a reply.

Heerak got off his bed.

He went to the kitchen to grab a few bottles of water, and visited his powder room to grab his favorite body lotion.

When he came back to his bedroom, Doseon was lying on his back in his bed again. He observed the side of the man’s face, which was staring blankly at the ceiling. Aside from blinking, Doseon did not move at all. It looked extremely strange and unnatural. Doseon always had a placid face, so it felt like he didn’t care about anything at all.

“Are you nervous?” Heerak asked as he approached the bed. He laid his body atop Doseon, being careful not to put too much weight on him.

“Yes.”

“More than that night?”

After some thought, Doseon opened his mouth slowly, and said, “Yes, I think so.”

“That’s good. You can get nervous too sometimes, huh? Nice, good on you. I’d be pretty upset if I was the only one who was nervous.” Heerak chuckled and narrowed his eyes.

He buried his lips into Doseon’s nape and moved smoothly across his skin, making kissing sounds. He could feel the other man

tremble. For a moment, he thought about turning up the heating or pulling up his bed covers, but he erased those notions from his thoughts. It was going to get hot.

"D-director…"

"Yes?" Heerak answered and pressed his lips down lower. He felt the trembles intensify from the skin he was touching.

"I think you're too close."

And here Heerak was, wondering what Doseon would say after stalling.

Heerak looked up. The tips of their noses touched. Doseon's eyes shook when he saw the distance between their faces. Heerak laughed. "Well, how're you going to have sex if you're not close?"

Doseon blinked in quick succession, then sighed while nodding. "I guess you have a point," and then he quickly added, "Then, how about turning off a few lights?"

Heerak grinned. He could understand why Doseon suggested that. Upon reentering his bedroom, Heerak turned on all the lights he could with his remote control. He had a good reason for it.

"I also think that having all the lights on kills the mood. But I have no choice today," Heerak said in a low mumble, as if to ask for understanding. "I don't know how I did it back then. So even though I understand how you feel, tonight is the first time I'm having a passionate night with a beta. I need to watch your expressions, and I want to take care not to hurt you. I need to be able to see to do that, so I can make sure everything is going well."

Doseon, who was silently listening, whispered quietly, "It feels like I'm inconveniencing you."

Heerak furrowed his brows. He didn't like this situation. He wasn't sure what exactly ticked him off, but it made him feel bad enough that he immediately made a face.

"Should I help you out, like last time?" Doseon asked.

"How exactly would you do that?"

Doseon sat up. Heerak moved away from him, giving him some space.

How would Doseon help him?

In that moment, a few scenarios flashed through Heerak's head as quick as lightning and dissipated into thin air.

Maybe he had asked this man to suck him off. Or maybe he asked him to touch him where he felt good. In any case, they both hurt his

ego, and he felt bad about it. Thus, he hoped that these were only baseless fears.

If he had one-sidedly forced intimate acts on a person who was nervous because it was their first time, Heerak feeling bitter wouldn't be the end of it. He would probably punch his pillow every night in guilt and self-loathing.

Doseon gave a perplexed look at Heerak's lost look and then he raised his arm slowly. Heerak fixed his eyes on the arm that stretched out.

Doseon grabbed the body lotion.

Heerak's baffled face slowly became tinged with embarrassment, and then it was completely replaced with disbelief. Heerak barely held onto the thread of sanity when Doseon squeezed some of the lotion on his hands. Then, when Doseon brought his hands down to his lower half without a second thought while leaning back on a pillow, he felt like he saw stars.

"Wait, wait, wait!" Heerak quickly snatched Doseon's wrist. Heerak's head was spinning—he almost saw a sight that he did not want to see. He was extremely lucky that he was able to come back to his senses, and was a hair's breadth away from seeing it happen.

"Doseon," Heerak huffed, his face completely red.

Doseon seemed to be a bit surprised by the change in Heerak's attitude because he asked, "Yes?" while blinking rapidly.

"What are you doing?"

Doseon answered the question faithfully, despite being a question that popped out from Heerak's shock. "Well, I'm lubricating my ho—"

"Stop!" Heerak yelled, cutting Doseon off.

"Already? We haven't done anything yet. Wait, no, that's also an issue—"

Heerak's agitated voice filled the room. "You liar! You complete scum! Mr. Doseon Yoon, you lied to me, didn't you?"

At this, Doseon could not keep a straight face. He was obviously shaken up. "No, I didn't. I never once lied to you."

No, Heerak was sure Doseon told him a big lie.

Heerak was upset. He felt lightheaded and could hear his ears ringing from his blood pressure shooting up.

"You said I was kind to you!"

Right, no matter how drunk I was, my manners probably didn't die off. Of course. No matter how delirious I was from being drunk, I'm sure I was skillful enough so that this man could call that night a "nice memory." I have never heard a single complaint from any of the omegas I slept with so far. Of course, my technique wouldn't just drop off the face of the earth.

Heerak scoffed at himself and shouted, "You said I was kind that night! Doseon, those are your words, right?"

"Yes, that's correct. That's an irrefutable truth. You were gentle with me."

"How? What part of it?"

Which part of a jerk who seduced you to have sex, skipped over all the foreplay, and shoved his meat in was kind or gentle?

Heerak felt his anger boiling inside while Doseon returned to being composed, bit by bit.

"You asked several times if it hurt, and you were concerned when I looked like I was having a hard time. You also noticed that I liked holding hands, so you kept my hands in yours."

Isn't that more than kind?

The eyes of the director who demanded an answer were ablaze. Because of that, Doseon only said what he thought were facts, and didn't put his question into words. Of course, Heerak could easily read that question from Doseon's eyes. And because of that, he grew angrier.

Heerak sighed multiple times in a row, severely agitated. "No. That's not being kind, from my standards."

"Is that so?" Doseon answered, but he didn't seem convinced. Heerak let out a deep, angry sigh, and decided to keep his response in. He roughly rubbed his face in frustration instead, and stretched his arms out to grab the other's shoulders.

"Listen carefully, Doseon." Heerak said, seeking assurance, and Doseon nodded resolutely at that.

"Okay, Director."

"Those things are a given."

"They're obligations. They're things I should do anyways. It's the least I can do for you, who opened your body to me. You shouldn't call that being kind. Ever." Doseon looked at Heerak with dazed eyes. Heerak smiled a small smile, and continued to speak calmly. "When I arranged to meet with you to ask you what happened that night, you

shouldn't have been nice about it. You shouldn't have answered that way; you should've cursed at me for being a prick. You should've said that you couldn't sleep well at night because you were so upset and angry that a bastard like me took your first time. What does that make me? I was stroking my own ego, and now I feel terrible."

Bewilderment cropped up on Doseon's composed face. From the look in the other's eyes, Heerak could tell that Doseon was quite shaken up.

Heerak firmed his grasp and continued, "That night, it was your first time, and you said you were nervous, so your head must have been in a confused mess. But from now on, even if you do it with another person, if they do what I did, I don't want you to think that what they're doing is gentle or kind. It would be even better if you ask the other person to do more things for you. The other person will probably like that too. Also, since you're a beta, you could be on the giving end. In that case, you should never act like how I did that night. Follow what I'm going to do tonight."

Something felt a bit odd.

Heerak was sure that this was something Doseon needed to hear. It was just advice that an experienced person was giving to a novice. But for some reason the more he talked, the more dampened his mood got. He somehow managed to say everything he wanted to, but he could feel the irritation pile up within him near the end.

The normally silent and stoic Doseon softly smiled.

When Heerak finally saw the smile that he craved, he stared at it intensely, as if to carve the image into his eyes. This time, as well, the smile was fleeting. Heerak felt like Doseon's smile was tantalizing, to the point that it mocked him.

While Heerak pouted in disappointment, Doseon quietly mumbled in a hesitant voice, "I don't think I will be able to do it with anyone else from now on. I can't really say for sure what will happen in the future, but at least for now, that's what I think."

"But why?"

"Because whoever it may be, I think I'll keep seeing you in them."

This felt a bit odd too.

Heerak almost mistakenly believed that the persistent feeling of annoyance was blown away in an instant. No, it wasn't his mistaken belief—this was a fact.

“If I did that, it would be rude to my partner, so I think it’s only right that I abstain completely.”

Heerak laughed, stunned. “Can I take that to mean you want to do it with only me?”

“What? No, that’s not what I meant.” Doseon shook his head. “I didn’t say that to trouble you. I’m sorry if you took it that—”

“Geez, stop!” Heerak cut Doseon off, irritated. “I was just about to feel better! But you apologized, again!”

“Director, you were feeling be—”

Heerak interjected, huffing to hide his embarrassment, “Right, stop calling me by my title! We’re not here to do business in bed, you know?”

Thanks to Heerak snapping at Doseon, Doseon’s eyelids fluttered before he could speak again. He must have been quite taken aback because he stuttered. “Th-then, what should I call you?”

“Mr. Heerak? Wait, no. You’re older than me. So how about just Heerak? Anyways, just call me by my name. My given name.”

After emphasizing *name* several times, the returning answer was very short. Doseon yelled fairly loudly, which was unexpected from him. “I can’t!”

Heerak also raised his voice, not wanting to lose, “Why not?!”

“H-how could I just call you by your given name?”

“Why can’t you? You can do it. Stop being so formal. I’m not *the director* in bed, too!”

“Stop being formal? I can’t do that. Never ever.”

“Wow, for Christ’s sake!” Heerak burst out laughing.

Heerak took his hands off Doseon’s shoulders and roughly ruffled his hair. He was laughing at the absurdity of the situation, but he wasn’t all that pleased about it. He wondered what the point of this argument was. They were both naked, but there was no sensual atmosphere and nothing remotely close to a romantic mood. At this rate, they might be sitting there, arguing until dawn.

“All right. I won’t keep on insisting, but I’m going to keep pointing it out when you say it. You’ve been warned,” Heerak mumbled as gruffly as he could. He scoffed to add to the effect. At that, the man facing him made a small smile.

Heerak looked down. His eyes fell on the other’s palms, wet with warmed up lotion. He impulsively reached out and grabbed the

other's hand. Heerak gently rolled his thumb, as if to soothe the other's stiff hands.

Doseon dropped his chin and stared at the thumb massaging his palm, entranced. The tip of Heerak's thumb drew a circle and slowly moved its way in between each finger, pressing on Doseon's knuckles as if to check each one. As Heerak calmly and steadily spread the lotion with his thumb, Doseon's cheeks and earlobes slowly grew pinker.

Heerak did not take his eyes off Doseon.

Hands were an excellent erogenous zone. Heerak thought that this would be even more the case with Doseon since he liked holding hands.

From the sensitive fingertips to around the wrist, Heerak massaged every corner of Doseon's hand, and as he did so, the hand grew warmer. Every time Heerak passed the groove between the thumb and forefinger, Doseon's head dropped lower. It looked like Doseon was at his limit; the blood rushed to his face.

There was no more lotion on his palm.

Heerak caressed the hand with his thumb . Heerak felt better and better as the nape and cheeks of the other man grew more flushed. He thought that it would be fun to turn Doseon completely red, like a tomato.

"Doseon."

"Yes?" Doseon's shoulders flinched at Heerak's call.

Heerak snickered and whispered, "Look at me."

"I can't right now!"

Then Heerak had no other choice. He would look at Doseon himself.

Heerak lowered his body and moved closer. As his slightly tilted head suddenly appeared in front of Doseon's face, Doseon widened his eyes in surprise. He reflexively lifted his head and Heerak quickly mirrored his movement.

Their lips brushed by each other and drifted apart.

Doseon blinked for a few moments. His eyes darted left and right several times as he blinked. The fluttering eyelids eventually stopped, locking onto a playful face that filled his vision.

"Wow, I've never seen you so red, Doseon. You turned a pretty pink color. Cute."

Heerak once again kissed Doseon's lips that gaped dumbly, unable to make a sound. Doseon only fidgeted, as if he forgot how to breathe.

Heerak wrapped the other's shoulders with one arm and bent forward. Doseon let himself follow Heerak and lowered his body on the bed as well.

They kissed countless times.

While their lips met and parted, Doseon tried to watch Heerak with half-open eyes. Doseon did not look away, in spite of his shaking shoulders, as Heerak's lips pressed on his cheeks, his forehead underneath his bangs, and as their noses rubbed on each other playfully.

Heerak was the same. As he stamped one kiss after another onto Doseon's mouth, he observed the pair of eyes that were gazing at him. He was a bit bothered at how rigid Doseon looked, but he was pleased with the splotches of red that bloomed on Doseon's cheeks and neck.

It was when Heerak's tongue dug into Doseon's mouth that Doseon squeezed his eyes shut.

Heerak's tongue explored the inside of the other's mouth. When he sucked and entangled his tongue with Doseon's, Doseon shuddered in response. Heerak used his other hand to pet the other's black hair. The tip of his tongue touched and wrapped around the soft flesh inside Doseon's mouth, while his fingers ran through Doseon's hair slowly, sharing his heat.

He explored the inside of Doseon's mouth until he felt like he was familiar with every corner of it. He even found the spot that made Doseon feel good. When Heerak gently pressed around the roof of the other's mouth, Doseon made sweet moans. Doseon's soft breathing melted inside Heerak's mouth, and Heerak felt better than ever. Heerak smiled to himself in satisfaction as he pulled his trembling body tighter.

Saliva mixed between them, and Heerak inhaled each breath as if to take it away. He hungrily overlapped the other's rosy lips, not leaving room for any sound to escape. As they made out, tilting their heads in different angles, Doseon's disoriented tongue finally seemed to soften. Again and again, Heerak's flesh invaded Doseon and shared its heat, and Doseon accepted it frantically. Heerak's heart

tugged strangely, which made him feel a bit funny. It all felt very endearing.

Heerak let the other's lips go, and carefully licked away the fluid around Doseon's lips. Panting, Doseon peeked out from his squinted eyes, and Heerak used that chance to peck at Doseon's eyelid. He chuckled at Doseon, who squeezed his eyes shut reflexively when Heerak's face drew closer.

Heerak made a wistful face and leaned lower. He felt like he could make out for another hour or two, but they had a long way to go tonight; there were a lot of things he wanted to experience.

The good part about caressing Doseon while facing each other was that Heerak could see every reaction.

Heerak was pleased with this advantage. He liked seeing Doseon blush, and he felt his head spin when he saw Doseon flinch while lightly biting his lower lip.

Doseon was not someone who displayed a colorful array of emotions; that was no different when he was having sex. Therefore, Heerak had to pour his attention into finding Doseon's pleasure spots. Heerak felt it was more enjoyable than he expected to feel with his fingertips every time Doseon's faint trembles changed to shudders.

Heerak never experienced something like this before.

There was never the need.

Between an alpha and omega, pheromones acted as a strong connection. When he had an omega in bed, there was no need for chitchat or observation. Heerak could feel the other's mood and euphoria from the pheromones that seeped into him, skin deep. He didn't need to keep watching how he thrusted his hips, or if his partner clenched their fists. His hands and lower body moved naturally in reaction to the chemical information that flooded into his brain.

At some point, Heerak would thrust his hips with his consciousness eaten up halfway by the pheromones. After all, the omega was in the palm of his hands. The information Heerak received from the pheromones gave him a sense of security, allowing him to focus on chasing after his own pleasure.

Heerak was used to that kind of lovemaking—that was the only kind of sensuality he knew.

So, it would be a lie if Heerak said he only felt a little uncomfortable this time.

Heerak was more meticulous as he poured his efforts into this night, more than ever before. He took the other's nipples in his mouth, and slid his hands down the other's sides with great care, all while constantly looking up to check on Doseon. He adjusted the strength he put into the tip of his tongue, watching Doseon's eyes slowly glaze over with pleasure.

The more Heerak caressed him, Doseon relaxed, becoming softer to touch. When the tension left Doseon's body, it eventually became easier to see his reactions. The sweat beading on Doseon's skin was from the heat and not from nerves. Heerak looked down at the other's waist; Doseon's member was at half-mast. Heerak could finally feel relieved. He felt confident that Doseon was ready for stronger stimulation.

Heerak positioned himself in between Doseon's quivering legs. Toes, ankles, calves—he carefully licked them one by one and pressed his lips on his shapely thighs. When he grabbed his ankles in each hand and drew up his knees, Doseon's palatable thighs and private place became better to see and caught Heerak's eyes.

Doseon's hot, inner thighs were pleasing to the touch, more so than expected. Heerak didn't stop at tasting them with his tongue and lips and grazed Doseon's skin with his teeth. Carefully, he put his heart and soul into making several perfect and distinct marks. He could not be prouder to see the traces he left behind. He felt good and kept feeling better about himself.

When he was fully intoxicated by pheromones, Heerak was swept away by his desire to immediately bury himself deep inside the omega underneath him. He was a slave to his instincts, digging deep inside, and making a mess out of areas most kept secret.

He didn't hate that kind of intimacy, he just took it for granted, and never thought about whether he disliked it or not. Heerak felt ecstatic about being able to exchange tender moments while staying relatively sober enough to carefully pay attention to each reaction.

He dropped lower, leaving a trail of red kiss marks.

Heerak caught every stifled moan that Doseon let out as he sampled Doseon's perineum down to his hole with his lips. Doseon quickly covered his mouth, but it was too late.

"Did it hurt?"

Heerak grinned leisurely, but he was having a hard time holding himself back. He didn't want Doseon to know, but when Heerak heard the other man's strained moans, he felt blood rush down to his groin. The sighs that echoed in Heerak's ears were stained in deep pleasure; the moment he heard them, they drove him crazy.

Doseon searched Heerak's face with his eyes, then shook his head side to side slightly.

"Then did it feel good?" Heerak smiled again and asked, persistently. Doseon didn't answer immediately; he let his answer hang for a while longer, but at Heerak's insistence, he nodded. Heerak smiled brightly at the honest answer, then pretended to be displeased and complained, "Could you move your hands?"

Doseon shook his head immediately. Heerak felt a bit upset by that, but he decided to leave it for now. He could simply pull Doseon's hands away from his face later.

Heerak pushed on Doseon's taint with the tip of his tongue and wrapped Doseon's shaft with his hand. He gently stroked it up and down. The response to the stimulation was immediate. As Heerak felt the member in his hand grow hotter and bigger, a content smile grew on Heerak's face.

"What are you? Wait, Director!" Doseon almost bolted upright in surprise, and Heerak pushed down on Doseon's abdomen, pushing him back down. Doseon complied to the touch, looking concerned. Heerak casually ignored the other's protest and brought his lips to the tip of Doseon's rod. He kissed the head, making sounds, and swirled at it with the tip of his tongue before finally taking it in his mouth. Doseon's torso lurched and writhed from the intense pleasure.

Doseon's mouth was parted while he drowned in pleasure, when his eyes suddenly widened. He was so close to climaxing when the stimulation suddenly stopped, which left Doseon shaking and wanting more. He warily gazed down at Heerak with eyes misted over with bewilderment. At that moment, his shoulders jolted in surprise. He was shocked at meeting with an unexpectedly icy pair of eyes.

"Director?" Heerak echoed back, displeased. Doseon finally realized why Heerak's attitude became cold and said hurriedly, "That's not what I—ugh—!"

Heerak lightly squeezed the base of Doseon's shaft, and gently blew on the surrounding hair. He almost felt sorry for Doseon, who was trembling and at a loss for what to do, which almost ruined his carefully presented act. Heerak managed to maintain his façade, and mumbled in a frostier tone than before, "Director?"

He had been waiting for this moment to come.

He ignored the faint whines and embarrassed cries calling out for him. He swore to himself that he would fix this habit. So if he made his efforts be for naught in a moment of weakness, it would be Heerak's loss.

"Are you fine with all directors of companies? You don't like chairmen? What about presidents?" He unceasingly barraged Doseon with questions in a wintry voice. Doseon denied it by fervently shaking his head, but Heerak totally disregarded it and continued to question him. "I know over ten executive directors, you know. If I introduced you to them, would you be able to do it with them? Is that what this is?"

Doseon shook his head hard. He even added, "I would never" this time.

At Doseon's response Heerak felt a bit soft-hearted, and lowered his eyebrows.

He was thinking of saying something a little more impolite next. He probably would not be able to fix Doseon's habit with his efforts so far. However, Heerak could not bring himself to continue his cold charade. He felt like the soft, pleading voice lingered in his ears.

Heerak gently wrapped his palm around the trembling knees. With eyes blurry and moist with tears, Doseon met Heerak's gaze. They peered at each other for a while. Doseon's lips kept squirming, as if he wanted to say something, but never ended up bringing anything up. Heerak could not keep it in any longer and burst out laughing. Doseon looked a bit relieved at that and quietly smiled along.

Heerak had left Doseon hanging, right before his release. As if to apologize, Heerak wrapped his lips around the head of Doseon's member and swirled his tongue. Doseon's rod, that was left twitching in need, jolted in anticipation. Heerak was cruel on purpose, but he wasn't able to achieve his goal. He carefully sucked at the glans and massaged the shaft, while inwardly slapping himself. When he saw

the other's eyes, wet with tears, his determination was washed away like a sandcastle on the beach.

Heerak could hear Doseon making strained sounds. Heerak flatly ignored all of Doseon's pleas for him to remove his mouth and to stop. The hitched breathing and words of refusal that he heard almost made Heerak scared that Doseon was going to faint. Heerak felt the thighs in his grasp shudder intensely. He swallowed the warm and bitter fluid, and licked off whatever remained on the head. It was quite thick, but it wasn't as unsavory as he expected.

After pressing his lips around the head, Heerak looked up. Their eyes met. Doseon looked like he was in disbelief, and Heerak couldn't help but laugh at that. The other was probably shooting lasers with his eyes while thinking of protesting, but Heerak just thought that it was cute.

"Don't look at me like that. I'm not done telling you what I have to say just yet," Heerak said.

Doseon looked downcast upon hearing that. Heerak snickered and sat up. He cracked open one of the water bottles and rinsed his mouth. He did it two times and felt a gaze from his side.

"Do you want a sip too?" Heerak asked.

"No, I'm just… sorry," Dooseon replied.

Heerak cocked his head to the side. "About what?"

"It must've been pretty bitter. That's why I told you to let me go."

The last bit was mixed with a bit of resentment.

Heerak thought quietly for a moment and a possibility came to mind, which made him laugh. His eyes folded into crescents, and he muttered playfully. "Did you think I was drinking because of the aftertaste?"

"Sorry?"

"You're wrong. I'm drinking it to kiss you."

After giving the heads up, Heerak took in the other's parted lips as soon as he returned to the bed. He scraped the palate of Doseon's mouth—Doseon's favorite spot—as much as he wanted, and ran his tongue over every inch of the inside of Doseon's mouth. His temperature caused Heerak's mouth to head up, which had cooled off when he drank the cold water. As Heerak lapped at every corner as if to quench his thirst, he noticed something was slightly off. Doseon's mouth felt a bit different than when they made out moments ago.

Heerak pulled away and quickly found out what bothered him.

How hard did Doseon bite and tug on his lips? The other man's lips were covered with swollen marks. Heerak ran his tongue across the injuries on Doseon's lips, looking displeased.

"Look at me," Heerak breathed in a low voice, and the eyes that were squeezed shut slowly revealed Doseon's hazy eyes.

"We still need to make something clear between us," Heerak said in a teasing tone, and Doseon's eyes begged for him to overlook this. This time, Heerak was not shaken. He tried to pressure Doseon into it, but he eventually gave up because Heerak couldn't last. Now, the only other option was to coax Doseon. Heerak felt pressed because if he failed again this time, he sensed that there would be no more opportunities.

He pressed his lips on his cheeks, glistening with sweat, and tenderly pushed away the hair stuck on Doseon's forehead. As his sweet and affectionate contact continued, the expressionless face gradually melted.

"Who do you want to do it with, Doseon?" he whispered in his ear, then kissed the trembling lips, "Who's holding you right now?"

He kissed Doseon again.

He planted several kisses on Doseon's face as he waited for the other man's answer. From his eyebrows, his temples, his jaw, to below his earlobes, the playful kisses continued; all the while, the other man struggled. Doseon finally opened his mouth. Heerak listened closely and could hear his name called out in a barely audible voice. The corners of his lips curled up in delight. If it wasn't for the "Mr." Doseon added, Heerak would have physically jumped for joy.

"Mr. Heerak?" His brows furrowed and repeated what Doseon said, and Doseon averted his eyes. Heerak stopped Doseon from turning away by grabbing his cheeks in both hands and lightly biting the tip of Doseon's nose. He could feel the other man quiver.

"What's with that? Are you kidding me?"

"Then what else should I have called you?"

"What do you mean 'what else?' Are you asking because you really don't know? You tried your best, so I'll pass it off as a joke this time, but there will be no next time. If you call me that again, know that I'll be extremely upset and disappointed."

Whoa, holy shit.

Heerak was amazed inside. It was fascinating to see how Doseon's stony face shifted before his very eyes. It was a tearful mess. That was the one thing that was a shame; it would have been better if it was a bright smile.

"Is it really that hard to just call me Heerak? Enough, even, for you to make that face?"

Doseon nodded, looking apologetic. Heerak expected this reaction, but once he received it, it didn't give him the best feeling. He was having trouble preventing his emotions from showing on his face again; he had made a fairly disappointed face before he even realized it.

"So—xt time—" Doseon mumbled something incoherently.

"What? I didn't hear you." Heerak narrowed his eyes.

Doseon fidgeted but muttered in a quiet voice again. "You said there'll be a next time, so next time I'll—mmph!"

Heerak pushed into the parted lips. He hungrily savored the insides of Doseon's mouth, not letting any fluid escape. He entangled his tongue with that of the other, who was still stiff from surprise, and ravenously swallowed the other's lips. He moved assertively and without hesitation. He pressed on ferociously, not permitting a single heated breath from escaping.

"For real?" Heerak pulled away and breathed. Doseon caught his breath and nodded a couple times. "I'll remember you said this."

Doseon could only nod again in response instead of answering.

"All right. You have to keep your word. I'm going to check that it wasn't just a lie to evade this situation next time." Heerak traced his tongue over the other's moist lips and smiled in satisfaction.

He was glad that Doseon suggested this reasonable compromise now. He could no longer ignore the tautness in his lower body that he felt from caressing him.

Heerak was still full of energy, but Doseon seemed to be tired from getting touched from head to toe. Rather, it would be weirder for Doseon not to be tired after continuously enduring feverish pleasure while being tense.

It was then that Heerak grabbed the body lotion. Doseon, looking flushed and panting, sat up carefully. Heerak gave him a questioning look, and at that, Doseon hesitantly spoke. Heerak could not understand it completely because Doseon's voice was muffled and indistinct from embarrassment. But after organizing what he heard

in his head, he could guess that Doseon said something along the lines of, “I feel bad just receiving, so I want to suck you off too.”

Heerak stretched one arm out and pulled Doseon’s shoulder into a hug. Heerak jumped at the chance to kiss the forehead of the man who instinctively leaned into the hug.

“Next time you can do it for me,” Heerak whispered in a low voice, smiling, “Leave everything to me tonight and relax. Just focus on feeling good.”

He tightened his grasp on Doseon’s shoulders and pushed the other man down. Doseon complied meekly, blinking, as he let himself be buried by the bedsheets once more.

Heerak could sense that Doseon was feeling a bit indignant, so he mumbled slyly, “No matter what you say, I can’t listen to that request of yours. I don’t really care about anything else—the only thought in my head is that I want to redeem myself from that night.”

Heerak squeezed out a generous drop of lotion into the palm of his hand. After waiting for the fluid to warm up in his palms to the perfect temperature, he slowly reached out. He spread the lotion with his fingertips, gently stimulating the flinching, tightly clenched folds of Doseon’s hole. Heerak looked up and saw Doseon’s face was completely stiff—that was probably not just his imagination. This kind of foreplay was on a different level than the somewhat playful yet sensual gestures just moments ago. Even the act of spreading lotion seemed to carry several innuendos. It was a declaration that he was going to penetrate inside; It was a warning to Doseon that he would have to feel an immense amount of pressure again, just like that night. Heerak was sure those kinds of thoughts would surge into his head without rest.

Although probably not to the extent that Doseon was feeling nervous, Heerak felt his chest throbbing from the tension. He had savored the deepest places of many omegas by prodding and stretching it with his fingers, but he never felt what he was feeling now. At this very moment, all his experiences where the omegas would plead and beg for something bigger and hotter once he put his fingers in were completely useless. Simply seeing Doseon jolt and gasp from being stroked between his hole and his perineum made Heerak feel parched.

Wow, holy shit.

After a pause, Heerak pushed in the tip of his thumb. As his fingertip entered bit by bit while spreading the lotion inside, Heerak also felt immense pressure. Heerak let out a sigh every time Doseon unconsciously clamped down when he felt nervous. Heerak felt like he would go insane. To think that this hole took in him that night made him dizzy, and controlled his thoughts.

He managed to push his thumb in and rolled it slowly, drawing a circle. His eyes strained every time the entrance puckered and twitched. At this rate, Heerak was worried that his rationality would snap, and he would just pounce on Doseon. He put on a lot of airs so far, but if he acted on his impulses, all his efforts would go up in smoke. He was worried about this the most.

"Doseon, does it hurt? How is it?" Heerak said, in a somewhat deflated voice. He was desperately trying to not sound like he was going out of his mind from excitement.

"No. It doesn't hurt, but… it feels weird," his voice cracked a bit at the end, but Doseon still sounded composed.

Heerak felt a bit defeated for some reason. On Heerak's side, he felt like he was a horny brat who was having sex for the first time and couldn't contain his excitement. He was agitated and restless.

Heerak slowly pulled his thumb out. As he deliberately pushed in his index and middle fingers in the puckering, slightly gaping hole, he heard Doseon inhale sharply. He looked up, worried that two fingers were too much too soon, and was met with a reluctant pair of eyes.

"Um, Director."

"Yes?" Heerak answered, but Doseon didn't continue right away. Doseon seemed to have a concern that he needed to think about before he said it. Heerak patiently waited for the other's lips to move.

"Truth be told, I'm extremely nervous right now."

Heerak's eyes widened at the unexpected statement. Since Doseon emphasized it so much, he was probably tremendously nervous.

"Are you uncomfortable anywhere? You can answer honestly, so please tell me." Heerak carefully conveyed to Doseon, who shook his head, saying that this wasn't what he was talking about.

"I don't know why I'm so nervous right now, but I'm more nervous than that night."

“Really? Then why do you look composed? You look how you usually look. I thought I was the only one who was nervous. So lame of me.”

“So if I, you know… start saying some nonsense, please ignore it. I wanted to let you know while my head was clear.”

“That’s a bummer,” Heerak mumbled in a low voice.

“Sorry?”

“I’m barely just hanging on to my sense of reason, but you’re saying your head is somewhat clear. That’s unfair.”

Heerak swirled his fingers around as soon as he stopped talking. The fingers that probed and explored inside slowly gained speed and rhythm. While delving into the deepest and most secret areas, Heerak’s eyes were fixated on Doseon’s face. The look in Doseon’s eyes was different from before, and his gasping lips were stimulating, in a good way. Even though his face was not close to his, Heerak could see that Doseon’s forehead was beading with sweat. Stretching and loosening the entrance weren’t the only things Heerak spent time on. He poured his energy into finding out where Doseon felt it the best. It almost felt like he was being tested for when he penetrated inside. How could he make that face crumble in pleasure?

He grabbed the lotion that was rolling around on the sheets, and squeezed another generous amount. While he was lubricating the entrance and surrounding areas sufficiently, he tried not to look too closely. He thought this before, but when he saw Doseon’s lower half dripping with white, translucent lotion, Heerak felt more lightheaded from this sight than anything else. He felt like his already thin patience would finally crack.

Heerak gazed at Doseon.

“I’m going to put it in now. Do you feel ready? I know it’ll be difficult, but could you relax?” Several thoughts popped up into his head, but the opportunity to say them never came up. Instead, when their eyes met, Doseon was the first to nod determinedly. Heerak’s brows twitched at the unexpected reaction. He chuckled.

Did he know what I was going to ask before he nodded? Maybe I’ll ask him later.

Heerak let out a small sigh, positioned the tip of his cock at Doseon’s entrance, and slowly pushed in. He could hear the sharp, suppressed cries from Doseon, but Heerak could not react to it. He felt a tight pressure that he had anticipated, and had experienced

before. Just as he thought, this person was not easy to penetrate; e felt like he would curse if he opened his mouth now. A cold sweat broke out on his back. Superdominant pheromones started to leak out, despite having no use. He felt like he would suffocate from his own excited pheromones.

He managed to enter halfway. As he slid in, he could feel his member grow, which made it absolute torture. This was the first time he had such a hard time when penetrating a partner.

Contrary to his lower half that was swept away by excitement, in his head he felt regretful. He let a novice prepare himself alone from start to finish. He must have been so panicked, and in great pain that night. As these thoughts cropped up in his head, Heerak felt guilty.

Heerak lowered his torso with care. He propped himself up with his elbows on the sheets, and moved cautiously so as not to put too much weight on Doseon. He couldn't see what face he was making. Doseon had covered his face with his hands, and Heerak could only hear the faint moans that were irrepressible by the palms of his hands.

"Doseon, move your hands."

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm probably a mess."

Heerak didn't sound too hot either, but it didn't compare to how Doseon sounded. The voice, tangled with pain and tension, was quivering and fairly quiet.

If he wanted to, Heerak could easily remove Doseon's hands. If it were anyone else, he would have acted on this as soon as it came up in his head. If Doseon was an omega, Heerak would have made the other submit to him with his pheromones without a second thought. However, that was not the case today. He couldn't speak for next time, but today at least, he did not want to come across that rough this time around.

"My face or my head, I don't have a preference, so could you touch me too?" Heerak whispered to Doseon.

Nothing else came to mind. He felt that maybe he was going too far by pushing these requests on Doseon in this situation, but his mouth moved like it had a mind of its own.

"I'm also good with wrapping your arms around my neck or back." Heerak kept talking when he saw the hands covering the

other's face flinch. "Anything is fine. I think I'll be really happy if you do that for me."

It was better to say anything than nothing at all.

Heerak was finally able to take a peek at the face that he wanted to see. Doseon's eyes shook anxiously, but he didn't look like he was suffering from extreme pain. That put Heerak at ease. Heerak pressed his lips on the other man's, who was moaning and breathing unevenly.

The two hands that were outstretched aimlessly slowly approached him.

Hesitant palms caressed Heerak's face gently. The tips of his fingers brushed away the sweat on his cheek and forehead, and gently swept against his temples and jaw. Heerak's narrow and shapely eyes were filled with delight. He savored this touch for a moment and tilted his head to the side to kiss Doseon's wrist in return. Just as one hand was about to fall from his face, Heerak snatched his wrist.

He gently pushed the hand onto the pillow and interlocked their fingers. His eyes folded in playful crescents, and Doseon's wide-eyed expression changed. A smile finally bloomed on those timid, squirming lips. Heerak thought that it looked like the face of someone trying to push down their incredible joy.

His free arm snaked beneath Doseon's shoulders and pulled him close. As their connected area jostled, Heerak heard Doseon groan. As if to soothe him, Heerak lowered his head and pressed his lips down on Doseon's jaw, and the nape of his neck.

It was difficult for Heerak to tolerate the penetration since it clamped down tightly, not granting him further access. Even so, he couldn't bring himself to tell Doseon to loosen up and relax. If it were possible, Doseon would have done that already. It was also a matter of Heerak's pride. Heerak imagined himself begging and pleading to allow him to go in deeper—just the thought of it made him want to scoff at himself.

Heerak's head movements became more engaged.

His hands were either on Doseon's shoulder or clasped with the other's hand, so only his face was free to move. Heerak kissed and ran his tongue over every inch of Doseon that he could reach. Doseon flinched as Heerak continued his feast of endless kisses, waiting for Doseon to relax his lower body, still calmly and steadily occupying

Doseon's insides. Heerak felt like he would be granted access easily, and yet the next moment, Doseon would clamp down. It almost felt like they were battling. Heerak would have been able to pierce through in one go with just one thrust; he had to struggle internally every second to repress this impulse.

I can't believe that having sex has always been this complicated. Heerak laughed to himself. *This is amazing!*

Finally, victory was his.

He couldn't have felt prouder than now. This was a victory by virtue of his patience. He felt sorry for Doseon, who was breathing heavily, but Heerak wanted to revel in his joy for a moment. After persistently persuading and coaxing Doseon, his inner walls were able to take Heerak in completely, giving Heerak an even more intense excitement by the second. Heerak felt extremely rewarded.

However, he couldn't just enjoy this by himself.

Heerak blanketed the lips that were letting out heated sighs. His mouth, which already felt like it was burning, was quickly scorched by the other's breath, which was mixed with moans. He massaged the trembling lips with the tip of his tongue, and swallowed the pool of the other's fluid that had nowhere else to go.

Oh, he didn't forget to do this for me.

Heerak was wrapped in Doseon's arms, pulling him into an embrace. A smile grew on his face in the middle of their kiss. Heerak leaned closer, allowing himself to be pulled by the other. Their sweaty, bare flesh overlapped each other, and groans slipped out. As Heerak tightened his grip on their clasped hands, the arm around Heerak pulled him closer in response; Heerak was full of smiles once again.

As the kiss continued, Heerak slowly started to move his hips. Taking over the inner walls wasn't the end of the story. In a way, this was only the beginning.

The tip of Heerak's cock pushed on the spot that had made Doseon's hips jerk when he was exploring Doseon's body with his fingers. Heerak rolled his hips in a circular motion, and the inner walls that wrapped themselves tightly around Heerak loosened, as if granting him permission.

Doseon's knees jolted in the air. Heerak felt sorry for the two legs that jerked about aimlessly on the bed sheets.

Heerak whispered, "Wrap your legs around my waist."

Doseon's perplexed eyes blinked, and his cheeks were soon flushed with embarrassment. Heerak smiled with his eyes and lightly pushed his hips up as if pressing Doseon on. This was very effective. Heerak felt the trembling calves touch his hips.

Heerak thought, *This is awfully quiet for sex.*

There were no aggressive movements, so he didn't hear the lewd sounds of flesh pounding on flesh. There was no pheromone-drunk omega to cry at every chance. This was sex that lacked an omega who knew very well that his dirty talk and moans stimulated the alpha. Only breathing and sighs reverberated through their overlapping mouths. Heerak could only hear the squelching sounds from the place that they were connected.

It was when he insistently rubbed and hit a spot deep inside that Doseon made a sound that was akin to a scream. If they weren't in the middle of kissing, Heerak would have caught the sound more clearly. He opened his eyes in slits, and his body shook in delight.

"W-wait, D-director, not there—!" As soon as his lips were freed, Doseon used all his facial muscles to express his desperation; he clearly signaled to Heerak to stop hitting that spot.

Heerak knew this, of course, but he didn't feel the need to show that he knew. Heerak playfully smiled, and said slyly, "I'll keep hitting that spot for you. Right here, where you like it."

Heerak slowly sped up his hip movements. They were at a boiling point. Doseon threw his head back and exhaled roughly at the overwhelming pleasure. Once, twice. Heerak grew his presence, forcing Doseon to adjust to it.

He went deeper and deeper inside.

Heat started to pool in Heerak's lower body as he kept hitting the spot that Doseon liked, and buried himself inside even deeper than before. Intense pleasure shot up to the ends of his hairs on his head, and his body felt like it was burning from the inside out.

"Is my cock that delicious? You don't seem to want to let go of me."

"No, ah! No, that's not—wait, ah, ahhh—please…"

Heerak licked the corners of Doseon's eyes, which were red from embarrassment and humiliation. Even these small gestures caused moans to escape Doseon's mouth and his insides to twitch. At this point, Doseon was so sensitive that his entire body behaved as if it

were an erogenous zone. Heerak grinned contentedly, and moved his hips to his fill.

"N—wait, Direc-director, ah… haah… ah—!"

"That night, I remember thinking I was going crazy from pleasure," Heerak mumbled as he lightly scraped his teeth on Doseon's earlobes and neck. His voice was low, filled with overwhelming pleasure. He growled in satisfaction, and the man in his arms shuddered. Doseon's legs, which were barely clinging to his hips, shook helplessly.

"Wait, don't say—! Ah… hnnn… mmm—"

Heerak sighed. "This feels better than back then; you're so warm and loveable."

Pumping in and out became easier as Doseon's insides softened up. This was the moment Heerak was waiting for.

He pounded into the soft and tender insides to his heart's content. He pulled the other's shoulders tighter and moved freely, finally letting out the excitement he had been holding in. There were no signs of pain from the sighs and moans he heard. Now, any hesitation he felt before disappeared. Only his impulse to make this person a mess from crying in pleasure controlled him.

"D-director, too deep—so fast—!"

"But you don't hate it."

"Please… mm… ah! Just a, a bit—mmmph… wait, no!"

Heerak lowered the hands that held the other's shoulders, and grabbed Doseon's ass. The man underneath shook from Heerak's somewhat rough handling. His long fingers massaged the soft swell of flesh before he grabbed it hard, staining the surrounding skin with a red tinge.

Wow, fuck. What the fuck is this?

Heerak let out a ragged breath and nibbled on Doseon's sharp shoulders.

Every time he plunged in and out of the softened insides, the inner walls felt like they were tenderly caressing Heerak. This was bad. Lightheadedness had already visited him, so if he started seeing stars, Heerak felt like he would lose his last thread of reason. No, perhaps he had no more rationality to lose at this point.

His eyes, burning with passion, lingered on one thing: their clasped hands that lay fixed on the pillow. It was quite strange. Rather than the repeated sensation of digging deep inside and

making a mess with his lower half, the gentle touches on his shoulder blades felt more vivid. When Doseon's fingertips scratched his back in desperation, Heerak felt his desire to come in his core boil over.

Oh, God. This… fuck, what do I do?

Heerak clenched his jaw and gulped. He could withstand most anything else. If he could, he wanted to delay coming and push his limits, just to prolong this moment. He felt a strong impulse that he never felt before, which made Heerak restless.

He wanted to knot.

On top of knotting, Heerak wanted to mark Doseon.

All he intended to do was to make Doseon a mess, but Heerak was the one in a sorry state. This was so ridiculous that he couldn't even laugh at himself. Did the fever get to his head?

Shivers ran down his spine. Heerak shuddered as he doubted his sanity.

This person was a beta. Even healthy, dominant omegas found an alpha's knotting cumbersome and difficult. Who didn't know that? This was common knowledge. All alphas and omegas heard this incessantly from their educational institutions, parents, and others around them. Heerak experienced this as well. He was pestered about the importance of contraceptives until his ears felt like bleeding.

He didn't need to make this person go through such a painful experience. It was unproductive and useless. Doseon wouldn't be able to bear his children anyways. Did he forget that Doseon was a beta for a moment? Was it even possible to want to knot in a beta, who lacked pheromones?

Knotting aside, marking was another big issue.

Marking—in other words, that meant Heerak wanted to dominate over everything about this person.

Me? Did I really have those thoughts? Heerak felt faint. His brain went snow white before being taken over by a dark abyss. *Did I really want to knot and mark after having sex this one time? Me, who said that I would never mark anyone, even if I got married. Just now, I—*

"Wow. This is just—wow." Heerak let out a weak laugh and felt a gaze from above.

"D-director?"

Heerak peered at the eyes, glazed with heat, and mumbled, “Doseon, I think I’ve finally gone insane.

“Sorry?”

“I kept feeling like I was going crazy. And maybe I really did snap.”

Heerak grinned broadly at the questioning look. This wasn’t the time to grab Doseon and explain. Even if he felt an inexplicably strange desire because of his sudden urge, this was his problem to deal with. Heerak pressed himself closer to the man under him and pumped his hips without restraint. When Heerak heard Doseon’s breath hitch, he appeased Doseon by tracing his tongue down Doseon’s neck, salty with sweat and heat. Every time he slammed at the spot where Doseon felt good, Doseon let out a tearful moan. In response to the cries, Heerak scraped his teeth on Doseon’s neck and shoulders while groaning and growling.

He felt himself close to climax when Doseon unconsciously clenched his hand tighter. The feeling he got when fingers between fingers intertwined with each other could not be put into words. He felt a mysterious feeling burst inside. At that same moment, his cock, which only wanted to go deeper and continue to ravish Doseon, instantly swelled up in size.

Heerak felt nothing but intense euphoria. His hips moved without caring about breaking after this moment.

With his thumb, Heerak massaged the head of Doseon’s cock, which was trapped between their bodies, and brought him closer to coming. Heerak felt the warm fluid between his fingers, and he too experienced his orgasm.

Heerak couldn’t wait until their breathing became even.

As if pulled by a mysterious force, Heerak kissed every inch of Doseon’s face, making kissing sounds. He liked seeing the glowing blush on Doseon’s face. He felt like he would go wild from excitement again, despite just reaching climax. Doseon’s gently trembling insides, which were still wrapped around him, seemed to feel Heerak grow hard again. Tension flashed in Doseon’s eyes. Heerak snickered and rubbed his lips across Doseon’s forehead.

“Are you okay? I think I went too hard near the end.”

“No, I’m all right.”

The response was bland as always, but for some reason, it sounded very sensual.

Heerak couldn't take his eyes off the lips uttering in a voice that was hoarse from the intense exercise they did.

"Are you in pain anywhere?" Heerak asked.

"Yes, I'm fine…" Doseon trailed off. He averted his eyes sheepishly and whispered in a tiny voice, "But I think my hand fell asleep."

Heerak tilted his head slightly and looked down at their hands, still clasped together on the pillow. They held each other so tightly that Heerak could not feel sensation in his hand. As soon as Heerak loosened his grip, he made a face at the prickling sensation shooting up his wrist.

"Oh, I think mine cramped up, too." After mumbling, Doseon smiled. This time, it didn't disappear, which made Heerak happy. He could gaze at those smiling lips for days without getting tired of it.

For some reason, he felt giddy; he wanted to keep staring at Doseon's smile like this forever . Maybe it was because Doseon rarely smiled. One smile was enough for Heerak to keep wanting more. He thought it would be nice if Doseon could smile like this all the time.

"Oh, right!" Heerak exclaimed while he playfully rubbed the tips of their noses together. "Damn, I completely forgot."

"Director?"

"I'm sorry, Doseon. I didn't intend to come inside, but it slipped my mind halfway through. I don't know why I keep forgetting things today."

"Oh, right." Doseon understood and seemed to say it was all right with his eyes. However, both his expression and voice—Heerak's brows furrowed—he got a bad feeling about this.

"Did I come inside you that day, too?"

"Yes."

He didn't know what he wanted to say after he asked, but he asked anyway. "After getting your permission?"

Doseon chuckled weakly. The bitterness on Doseon's lips made Heerak feel distraught. "That night, I don't think you were in any state to ask for permission for anything."

Heerak made a noise of displeasure.

Doseon probably carefully chose his words in an effort to comfort Heerak. He was thankful, but his head was still dizzy from self-reproach. "Director."

Heerak was internally clicking his tongue at himself when he snapped back to reality at the soft call of his title. “Yes?”

“I wonder what time it is right now.”

“Huh, me too.” It was hard to tell the passing of time in this brightly lit room. Heerak glanced over at the head of the bed and the nightstand, but his phone or watch weren’t in either place; he then remembered that he abandoned them in the bathroom when he took off his suit.

He slowly let go of the hand he was holding. Both of their faces crumpled in the same way. Heerak snickered and carefully lifted his upper body, gently holding the other’s wet thighs, and pulled out from the place where they were one. He could feel a slight tremble in his grasp.

Heerak quickly looked up. Just looking at the bodily fluids and lotion mixed together and stuck on Doseon’s pubic hair, made his lower body feel tight again. He had to use all his self-restraint to stop himself from submitting to his primal desires to do it one more time. “Sit tight and wait for me, all right?”

“All right.”

As he got up, his eyes kept escaping down to Doseon’s lower half. Seeing Doseon look sleepy and dazed, melting in the bed sheets, made Heerak swallow.

Heerak did his best to move his legs and get out of the bedroom. He felt like he was running away. Patience and restraint—he was amazed that those things were even possible in this situation.

He found his phone in one of his suit pockets near the bathroom. It was past midnight now. He received one call from Seokchan, but seeing the lack of a follow-up text, it didn’t seem like the call was for something urgent. He might have just been curious as to how the discussion went with Doseon.

We did have a very serious and intimate discussion. However, the issue was that we used our bodies to talk.

Heerak grabbed chilled water from the fridge and returned to the bedroom. Doseon whipped his head in Heerak’s direction when he noticed his presence, and blinked blankly. He looked at Heerak with questioning eyes, and Heerak responded, “It’s past midnight. A lot more time passed than I expected.”

Doseon’s face darkened as soon as he heard the answer. Heerak asked what was wrong, and the answer came out with a sigh. “I don’t

think the buses are running anymore. Director, I don't really know the area, but is there anywhere I can grab a taxi?"

Heerak gave Doseon a confused look before he asked, "Is there a reason you need to go home right now?"

"No, nothing like that. But I thought it would be better if I went home because you might feel tired, and I need to go to work in the afternoon."

Heerak drew closer.

"Go to work? Tomorrow is your off day," Heerak said and gently caught Doseon when he attempted to sit up. He helped the other lay back on a pillow.

Doseon thanked him with his eyes and carefully continued, "Today… no, yesterday, I took an absence without leave. I can't take two days off in a row. Plus, I need to explain my circumstances to my manager."

"Why would you need to explain yourself? I'll take care of it. I'll take care of everything. Besides, you should know that I'm not planning on letting you go home tonight."

Heerak sat on the edge of his bed and twisted the cap off of a water bottle. He wrapped Doseon's hands around it and brought a newly opened bottle to his lips.

"Uh, then… are you saying that I should sleep here?"

"Of course," Heerak answered, then bluntly furrowed his brow. "Doseon."

"Yes?"

"Even if you wanted to go home immediately, you shouldn't have talked about taking a bus or hailing a cab."

"Sorry? Then…" Doseon trailed off, looking like he truly had no idea what he should have asked.

Heerak pulled up the corner of his mouth and said firmly, "You should have asked for a ride back. You should have told me to take you home safely. What else? What did you take me for? Did you think that I was going to tell you to go home because I was done with you?"

Doseon flinched and answered straight away. "No! Not at all. But still, I wouldn't dare make that request of you, Director."

"Who said you should ask the director? You should ask that to Heerak Cho—me, the human who spent a hot and steamy time with

you. And request? This is barely a request. This is something you can demand; you have every right to."

Doseon didn't answer, he only quietly listened. Heerak didn't know what he should do with this man, who shut his mouth tightly whenever he felt cornered.

"Why aren't you answering? Did you understand what I said?"

"I understood," Doseon calmly answered. He looked like he was pouting, and Heerak felt a smile slipping out in response.

Heerak thought he was obstinate, but this person was quite stubborn as well.

"It sounds like you understood, but you have no intention of listening to my suggestions," Heerak snickered. "Well, whatever. I can just knock out all these useless thoughts from now on."

Heerak stood up when he finished talking. He shoved his hands under Doseon's armpits, and Doseon—who was weak and drained—readily complied.

When Doseon realized Heerak completely lifted him up, he panicked and whined, asking him to put him down, which Heerak ignored. Doseon wasn't as light as a feather, but he wasn't so heavy that Heerak couldn't carry him to the bathroom. Heerak supported Doseon's back and buttocks tightly and simply whispered, "Stay still and wrap your arms around my neck."

***

The heart of the city had a purple glow.

Doseon, who didn't look like he was going to sleep any time soon, drifted off not long after he laid down on the bed. Heerak was also very tired, but he couldn't fall asleep very easily. He felt like it was a waste to fall asleep. He heard that when people were excited, they couldn't fall asleep easily, and this fit the situation perfectly.

The man before him was in deep sleep and seemed like he would not wake up, no matter what was being done to him. Heerak poked the tip of Doseon's nose and kissed his mouth and cheeks, but Doseon's eyes were shut, dead to the world. It made Heerak think that Doseon had, to some degree, passed out.

Heerak simply stared at Doseon's face for a while.

In a room darkened by blackout curtains and illuminated by only the faint glow of the lamp, Heerak felt a bit peculiar gazing at a

sleeping person's face. It might have been more so since this was the first time he had ever done this.

A face that didn't have any sharp angles nor particularly striking features—it was hard to believe that Heerak staring at a strictly average beta's face, mesmerized, was a reality and not a dream.

He didn't know how much time had passed.

He could not fall asleep.

Heerak decided to leave the room where Doseon was breathing evenly and in a deep sleep.

The sheets on the bed where they shared their intimate moments were damp with sweat and semen. Heerak did not want to use that bed, nor make Doseon sleep on it either. As soon as he came out of the bathroom, he carried Doseon—wrapped in a nightgown—straight into the guest bedroom.

Doseon sleepily blinked his eyes and looked a bit puzzled, so Heerak mumbled, "Because we soaked the sheets in there."

Doseon looked cute as he nodded in understanding. He wasn't sure if it was just his eyes playing tricks, but Heerak thought Doseon's cheeks were tinged pink. He couldn't hold himself back from planting a kiss on those blushing cheeks, at which Doseon made that soft smile that drove him crazy. Heerak couldn't hold himself back any longer. This time, he kissed Doseon's lips. They exchanged sleepy, sweet kisses on the fresh bed for a long time.

Heerak felt like he would be content with staring at Doseon's sleeping face all night long. However, he dragged himself out of the bed. He wanted to grab his phone and pick up the clothes that were strewn about on the bathroom floor, And he thought he might as well figure out Doseon's clothing size. He didn't want to send Doseon home in the clothes and underwear that were neglected on the floor all night. Heerak was never so grateful to have a shopping mall nearby.

Heerak thought that he was merely feeling a bit giddy.

He didn't think it was bad that something strange was happening to him. Just up until a week or two ago, his thoughts tangled into a mess every time he recalled Doseon, but now he felt oddly relieved, and free.

Nothing was actually solved. They only had se x twice.

Heerak decided to contemplate what exactly made him feel so refreshed later on.

It was when he stopped in front of the master bedroom that he felt nauseous, and Heerak held his breath without realizing it.

The room was thick with pheromones.

That wasn't all. The pheromones were so sharp and dense that he felt like he would drop dead from asphyxiation. This was the first time his head hurt from his own pheromones. Most alphas probably would never experience this.

Was he so preoccupied that he didn't notice this before?

Although there were probably no alphas or omegas who hid their pheromones while having sex, this was a bit too much. Heerak never released pheromones to this extent, even when his partner was an omega in their heat cycle. The concentration of the pheromones was a problem, but the bigger issue was the emotions conveyed by them. This was clearly a territorial claim, and a threat to others.

"Don't touch this man."

"This man is mine."

He honestly felt quite embarrassed and shy when he told Doseon to not lift a finger, and let Heerak bathe him. Heerak could smell his own pheromones emanating from Doseon. Doseon was completely drenched in strong and dense superdominant pheromones. This scent wouldn't be removed with just a couple bottles of deodorant. Doseon would not notice, but Heerak was certain that any other alpha or omega who came near Doseon would be immediately repelled.

When he dropped lower to clean up his traces, Heerak became red down to his neck. Steam could very well be coming from his head right now. His mind was filled with a certain image: how he crammed his pheromones inside as he ejaculated. The other's lower half reeked with the smell of Heerak's pheromones. He felt like his face would explode. Despite being embarrassed, he couldn't show it; even if he showed it, a beta like Doseon wouldn't be able to understand it well, so he kept quiet.

He was more excited than he thought.

He thought that was all there was to it when he got out of the bathroom.

For a while, Heerak stood in front of the door of the bedroom, at a complete loss. He could understand how this happened, objectively speaking.

Heerak wanted to knot and mark Doseon when he was inside him. If that was what was going through his head at the time, Heerak could only presume how many pheromones he would have let out.

However, that was the limit to what he could process.

The faint fear he felt when he wanted to mark and knot took root in his heart again. Maybe something was actually wrong with his head. Those hazy feelings came to reality and slapped Heerak in the face.

Something really is wrong with you. This isn't normal. Just look at the emotions tangled in with these pheromones.

He stood still as a rock for a while, then grabbed his phone and fled the bedroom. He couldn't bring himself to face Doseon right now; blood would rush down if he saw that sleeping figure.

He grabbed the pack of cigarettes that was lying on the coffee table and stepped out on his rooftop terrace. He needed the cold wind to cool his head. He had hoped for a bone-chilling wind, but the crisp, early morning air was nonetheless helpful. He sat at the table and started smoking, his head wrapped in his hands.

The first thing Heerak thought was that he should visit the hospital for some treatment or consultation.

Unimaginable things kept happening to him lately, one after another. Today was the cherry on top. He definitely could not overlook the issue with his pheromones now that he should have had a good handle over them. No matter how turned on he was, the degree of his pheromones in that room was excessive. He had completely lost control. Pheromone regulation was something instinctual; Heerak was superdominant for a good reason. The superdominant level meant that he was supposed to have outstanding control and concentration of his pheromones.

He was ashamed to call himself superdominant now. Control and restraint—they were both impossible for him now. It meant that his pheromones were momentarily completely outside his control, h ow could he not be afraid?

What the hell is happening to me?

If managing his pheromones was the only issue, Heerak would probably overlook it. The real reason he considered therapy and consultation was because he couldn't get a grip on his feelings.

This whole thing was a shock; this side of himself felt unfamiliar and alien. No matter how excited he was, the fact that he failed to

suppress his own pheromones instilled an ambiguous sense of fear.

However, even as he kept passionately turning over these new facts while feeling frightened, he didn't hate this serious and sensational situation. He didn't feel repulsed by it at all.

This was new to him. He never knew that hate and fear could act separately from each other. He thought that fear would obviously be followed with hate, but this wasn't the case—especially regarding the bizarre things that were happening to him now.

What should he do about Doseon? At first, Heerak thought about how best to quietly and cleanly handle this situation. It was very interesting when he randomly spewed out *crazy talk* to that man. The man who made him feel anxiety whenever he thought about him, instead felt loveable when Heerak embraced him—to the point where Heerak thought about knotting and marking the man while embracing the pheromone-doused body.

His head hurt as there were too many concerns in his head. However, he didn't hate this moment, either. He laughed at that. After thinking for a while longer, he got up. The purple glow was nowhere to be seen when Heerak turned his back to the landscape. Sunlight now illuminated the city.

He washed his hands and face. He was planning on calling Seokchan as soon as the day grew lighter, but he thought better of it.

Today was Thursday anyway. He had completely cleared his schedule so he could negotiate with Doseon. He could call Seokchan later. He also felt like it would be better to wait for Seokchan to call him again, because if he called his secretary now, he felt like he would blabber about everything that had happened recently. His trustworthy secretary would patiently listen to everything, but Seokchan would probably not give him a plausible solution. Both the speaker and the listener knew full well that this was an issue Heerak himself would have to solve.

Heerak turned his head from side to side and inspected his face; a sigh escaped him. His radiant face didn't vanish just because he lacked sleep, but he didn't like the fact that fatigue could be seen. He needed to force himself to sleep, at least for a little while. He didn't want this ugly mug to be seen by Doseon.

He recalled the photos in Doseon's phone. They were pictures that Heerak thought of approvingly when they were released. Doseon said that he felt better when he looked at those photos, in which

Heerak was practically dripping with sparkles. Heerak didn't want to lose to the pictures. If he wanted to shine brighter than those photos, he needed to sleep.

"Doseon?" Heerak slowly entered the guest bedroom, but when he saw the figure fidgeting in the darkness, his pace quickened before he knew it.

"Executive Director…" Doseon was sitting on the edge of the bed, and he stood up unsteadily when Heerak entered.

Heerak grabbed both of Doseon's arms to support him and looked down, locking his eyes with Doseon's.

"Why're you up already? Bathroom?"

"No, because I didn't see you."

If that was the reason, Heerak had no reason to help Doseon up. He pushed Doseon back onto the bed. "You fell fast asleep as soon as your head hit the pillow, even though you said you didn't think you could fall asleep."

"I'm sorry. I really thought I wouldn't be able to fall asleep at the time, but I passed out before I realized it."

Heerak sat down beside Doseon, who was sitting upright in bed, looking blank.

Heerak reached out unconsciously. His fingertips brushed Doseon's cheek and forehead. When he thought that it was a shame to just touch him with his hands, his head leaned forward. He gathered his lips, pecked above Doseon's eyebrow, and ran his fingers through Doseon's hair.

Doseon, who simply sat blinking, mumbled quietly, "I thought that you might have gone to work."

"Leaving you behind all alone?" Heerak snickered. "There's no way I would do that. Plus, I don't have work today. I intended to meet with you today, so I cleared my schedule by pushing everything back."

Right. Thinking about it, I'm being very weird right now too.

It was true.

Heerak was being very strange.

He was holding hands, hugging, and kissing nonchalantly while carrying out a conversation very cheerfully. The scene flipped 180 degrees overnight. Having sex one more time caused quite the transformation. He didn't need to think twice about what he was like in the past, since there had never been another time like this.

Heerak didn't hate touching his partners affectionately, but he also thought he wasn't the type to cling onto his partner to the point of annoyance. That wasn't cool. He always thought that he would never use his smile and clutch tightly onto someone just to win their heart.

He felt like a fool again.

"Doseon."

"Yes?"

"Do you not hate that I keep touching and kissing you?"

Heerak thought that it was a bit silly to ask this while he was rubbing his lips on Doseon's forehead, but he couldn't help it. He stamped his lips on every inch of Doseon's face as if he was acting cute to get a positive answer from Doseon.

"Though I get nervous when you touch me, there's also this other feeling; something stronger and pleasant."

Wasn't that something people usually blush and say shyly? Whatever the case, it didn't seem like a line that should be said calmly, like making a brief at work. Why was Heerak the one getting secondhand embarrassment?

Heerak grinned and pulled Doseon's shoulders in. Doseon followed without resistance as Heerak wrapped both his arms and buried his face in Doseon's neck. The scent of pheromone-saturated skin tickled Heerak's nose. His embarrassment resurfaced, making Heerak think that his face would burn up again.

"Are you in pain anywhere?"

"My thighs and hips are a bit sore, but that's all. Other than that, I'm fine."

"Aren't you hungry?"

"Yes, I'm fine, but you—"

"I'm not hungry yet either. Oh, by the way, do you have any plans today?"

"No, I don't."

Heerak made a satisfied face. "Excellent. Then let's sleep in, and then we can have lunch together. Even better if we can have dinner together, too."

Doseon, who was patiently listening, asked as if something was wrong. "You're going to spend the entire day with me?"

"Is that a problem? Am I not allowed to do that?" he asked in a playful tone.

“There is a problem” Dooseon replied with seriousness.

Heerak lifted his head at that. His face darkened. “What’s the problem?”

“I’m not that interesting, so I think you will be very bored by me.”

“What the heck? I got tense for no reason.” Heerak burst out laughing and hugged Doseon tightly.

There are so many things that I want to know; my head feels like bursting. Rather than being bored, I’m going out of my mind trying to catch my racing thoughts. I’m even worried that something might be wrong with me.

A lot of thoughts came up, but he didn’t bring any of them up to Doseon. He feared that once he opened his mouth, he would open the floodgates, and who knew what nonsense he would say. That would be very embarrassing and mortifying. These kinds of desperate words would only come back to haunt Heerak later on, so he felt that it was best to say less.

What shall they have for lunch?

If he asked that to Doseon, Heerak was sure that the answer would be in the same tone from last night, “Anything is fine” or “I’m good with anything.” so this time, he decided to change the question.

“What would you like to eat with me?” Heerak asked.

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III

Tonight, Heerak had to entertain guests at a business dinner.

Even if Heerak asked Seokchan to work some magic, this was an important meeting that he couldn't cancel. It was useless to whine about why it had to be dinner, all he would receive were his secretary's somewhat judgmental looks.

As the phrase suggested, wine and dines inevitably included wine.

Lately, Heerak had made efforts to not drink even a single drop of alcohol in the evenings.

He wasn't suddenly doing it for the sake of his health; he enjoyed both smoking and drinking, and he wasn't planning on quitting either one any time soon. It was not because his stomach was sending flashing red lights from over-drinking over the last few days, either. The reason was simple: he couldn't drive if he drank.

It was plain as day what reaction Seokchan would have if Heerak told him he couldn't drive if he drank. Seokchan would give him a questioning look and retort, nonplussed, "Don't you have me?"

If his secretary wasn't available, Heerak also had the option of relying on a chauffeur company for a ride.

Whether he called Seokchan or a chauffeur, those amenities were not available for Heerak's use tonight. After midnight, he had a reason to place himself behind the wheel.

As they headed to the dinner appointment, Heerak racked his brain in the backseat. Seokchan shot weird looks through the rearview mirror, but he couldn't be bothered to worry about that.

Heerak didn't understand drinking until he had a near death experience. He only went wild when he occasionally met his friends who, like Heerak, were always neck-deep in work. However, unlike them, Heerak knew restraint, and never went overboard with his drinking. It was the same for entertaining clients. Although they exchanged drinks, Heerak never went over his limit. Moreover, when he was entertaining guests, both Heerak and the other party could readily refuse to drink further. Heerak had always been able to drop a hint when he didn't want to drink anymore.

However, this time, drinking was going to be tricky to get out of. A dinner with a client—there was an unspoken agreement that both sides must drink to a certain extent. Heerak had never told a client outright that he wouldn't drink at all.

Should I dump my drink in a bin when Director Kang leaves the table? No, that wouldn't work. Mr. Kang would probably want to watch me take my first sip. Then how about this? Telling him that my stomach was punctured recently, so alcohol was a no-go. But don't I look too healthy for an injured person? I wouldn't believe that, either. Perhaps it's better to not lie at all than to tell obvious ones.

There was always the option of ditching the lies and excuses and simply telling the truth. The moment that it crossed Heerak's mind, he shook his head at himself, immediately dismissing it. He would rather die than tell the whole truth; Heerak did not want to use *that person* as an excuse or sell him out no matter what.

They arrived at the restaurant. Heerak thought Director Kang wanted a one-on-one, but he readily let Seokchan sit in. Heerak felt sorry for his secretary, but at that moment, Seokchan was a hindrance to Heerak's plans. Now Heerak had no choice but to lie to Director Kang. What would Seokchan think when he heard the lies? Heerak snickered sardonically on the inside.

Heerak made himself look as apologetic and anxious as possible. "I am so sorry, Mr. Kang, but I have to catch an international flight in a few hours for a business trip. I'm going to be too tired if I drink tonight, so I will only be able to fill your glass."

He thought this was a weak excuse, but it ended up being a piece of cake to nonchalantly lie and smile at the same time.

Director Kang immediately followed up with dramatic comments. "I heard Executive Director Cho was busy these days, but you're much busier than I imagined. I'm so worried that I'm taking too much of your precious time when you should be resting. If you had told me in advance, I would have been able to reschedule."

Heerak smiled and reacted to each comment as best he could, but honestly, he wanted to see what kind of face his secretary was making; he felt very conscious of his secretary's stare.

After a brief discussion and dinner, he sent Director Kang off and on the way out, Heerak casually mentioned playing golf to the disappointed director. Heerak dropped the name of his older brother

with whom Director Kang desperately wanted connections. Since Heerak asked him for a favor, it was only fair for Heerak to give something the other man could look forward to—golfing, just the three of them. Director Kang seemed to consider the lip service a bigger gain than the discussion about their contract, because he laughed out loud and couldn't stop smiling. When they parted ways, he wished Heerak a safe trip.

"Where shall I drive you now, are you going to the airport?" Seokchan asked as soon as they got in the car.

Heerak covered his face with his hand and chuckled. This was why Heerak thought that it was unfortunate that Seokchan sat in.

"Why ask when you know it's a lie?" Heerak questioned with a smile.

After snapping at Seokchan to hide his embarrassment, Seokchan replied snidely, "Well, how would I know? You've been so secretive lately, I thought maybe you did have a business trip that I didn't know about."

Secretive—this pricked at Heerak's conscience, so he didn't say anything else the entire way home.

Heerak told Seokchan to take him home. Seokchan made an even more bewildered face than before, because he never expected Heerak's destination to be his home after making an excuse to the other director that he needed to go out of the country. Seokchan peered at Heerak to see if was telling the truth, and Heerak nodded resolutely.

Seokchan hesitated, before saying in a very dubious tone, "Executive Director, it's fine for you to hide things from me, but I'd appreciate it if you could at least tell me if you had any health-related issues. You should let me in on them, so I could come up with a good explanation if I ever need to appeal to the chairman or general manager."

When he heard that, Heerak clapped his hands together and burst out laughing, although Seokchan didn't look like he was in the mood to laugh. Heerak felt sorry for the sour-faced secretary, but Heerak had a hard time trying to stop his laughter.

In any case, he only felt more apologetic towards Seokchan. Heerak was sure that if he caught a cold or got sick from drinking too much, his family would make a big fuss about nothing, and reprimand his poor secretary.

“It’s not what you’re thinking, I just really wanted to go home.”

Only half of it was true—the other half was somewhat of an excuse.

Later, if Seokchan complained that he was upset and disappointed in him, and felt like Heerak was being unreasonable, Heerak wanted to tell Seokchan that, although he was hiding things, he had never lied to him . Heerak needed to refrain from deceiving Seokchan. However, if he wanted to puff his chest out and confidently tell his secretary that, at least Heerak didn’t make stuff up.

Seokchan only felt more incredulous and smiled in defeat at Heerak’s answer that he just wanted to go home. If Heerak simply wanted to go home, he would have had at least one drink. Seokchan wanted to ask if he was expected to believe that, and reading his face, Heerak only chuckled; his chuckle was a sign that he was going to keep his silence.

Seokchan turned the steering wheel toward Heerak’s home, then said in a troubled voice, “Please don’t go around causing accidents again. Wait, no, even if you do make a mistake somewhere, please let me know immediately. After all, don’t you have something you have to resolve?”

Heerak itched to say something.

If he said, “The thing you mentioned, I have no mind to sort that out anymore,” he wondered how his secretary would react. Seokchan would be surprised, but probably not that shocked. In fact, thinking about the time he spent with Seokchan, Heerak could guarantee that his secretary already had an idea about the current situation. He was sure of it because Seokchan hadn’t brought *that topic* up—namely, asking Heerak if he was seeing anyone recently. Seokchan was clever in that he left room for Heerak to escape, even though he badgered him with questions. Seokchan must have thought that the executive director was acting suspiciously, as he went straight home after the day’s work was completed; he probably wondered what Heerak was doing at home.

Of course, he had no intention of spilling the beans to Seokchan, even if he asked—at least for now.

There were several reasons he didn’t want to tell Seokchan; the biggest one was embarrassment. No matter how much private information he divulged to his secretary, Heerak felt like he would

want to dig a hole for himself in humiliation the moment he told him.

Back then, he went on such a rampage, and he loathed the subject so much that he always made a disgusted face.

Heerak laughed, because that was all he could do. Objectively speaking, he was being weird. It felt like something went wrong with him since *that day*.

That day, as in the day after he slept with Doseon for the second time.

They finally arrived at Heerak's home.

Casually getting on the elevator in front of Seokchan, he was a totally different person as soon as the doors of the elevator closed. Once getting to his floor, he roughly threw the front door of his penthouse open and made a beeline for the bathroom. He stripped off his suit without a second thought and checked the time. It was 10 minutes to 11 P.M. He felt pressed for time, and irritably muttered some curse words as he didn't have much time left. Because of this, he didn't have time to meticulously wash his face. Tonight, he had no choice but to use the shower booth instead of taking a nice relaxing bubble bath.

He picked up whatever body wash and moisturizing lotion he could grab, and spread it across his face, giving himself a nice, moisturized glow. He dried his hair thoroughly and styled it lightly with some hair product.

Afterwards, he headed to his dressing room. His footsteps were heavy, As he had just stepped into the part of the process where he couldn't stop sighing from exhaustion.

Among those who were handsome and beautiful, there wasn't anyone who didn't know that their looks were superior to others; Heerak was the same. Therefore, to use his looks well, he needed to pay careful attention to his style. Until now, Heerak had faith in his appearance, and simply wore the first thing that caught his eye among whatever his personal stylist chose for him; he was now in the opposite situation.

He selected an outfit, discarded it, and selected another one. The most draining task of the day was to choose the clothes that best complimented his looks.

Heerak had an on-call stylist who would come running to him, even in the evenings, and he had a beauty salon where he could drop

in after a call despite not booking an appointment. The reason he tearfully gave up these conveniences was because of Seokchan.

If he used these services every day, especially late at night, news of this would reach Seokchan's ears within a few days. He knew Seokchan had suspicions but no hard evidence, so the nagging stopped earlier than it should have. It would be bad for Heerak if he practically spoon-fed Seokchan evidence that he was busy playing around at night.

He didn't want to do that just yet.

Heerak didn't hate the thought of Seokchan catching on to this relationship by any means. It was ridiculous to dispute the ifs and buts of betas and whatnot at this point, it was just that Heerak didn't want to share these heart-racing moments with anyone else for the time being. He couldn't even comprehend the situation himself. Because he couldn't understand it, Heerak thought he might as well trust his gut.

Lately he went around high-end stores, and shopped for all the designer clothes he could get his hands on. If his personal shopper said something suited him, Heerak made a custom order on the spot. Likewise, if the stylist recommended something else, Heerak recklessly swiped his credit card. It was hilarious to watch his secretary's jaw drop at each purchase. He claimed that it was just retail therapy. Unsurprisingly, Seokchan didn't seem to believe that.

Previously, Heerak always let his personal stylist use their discretion to buy his clothes. Now, he willingly made time in his tight schedule to go shopping with his stylist. The stylist seemed to be as shocked as Seokchan was. Anyone would be surprised if the executive director who always had a hands-off attitude to shopping, started swiping his credit card at luxury shops left, right, and center. He seemed to have become a shopaholic overnight.

Clothes started to pile up so much that Heerak considered creating another dressing room, since he had enough rooms in his apartment for it . His closet already had the clothes that he bought regularly, yet just yesterday, he put in another custom order. As his orders arrived one by one, his dressing room became completely inundated. Even so, he felt that something was lacking tonight as he put several articles of clothing against his body in front of his full-length mirror. He wasn't having a hard time choosing because he had too many options; the problem was that nothing seemed to match

well with his good looks. He was sure others would scoff if they heard this, but this was Heerak's biggest concern these days.

After selecting his outfit, his shoes, and finally his watch, he could head out now.

As he repeated this every night, he always had the same thought. 'What am I even doing?'

Why am I going this far?

Several answers that were possibly correct came to mind. However, he didn't want to acknowledge any of them yet, and he wondered if it was all right to admit his feelings so easily.

If he acknowledged his feelings, would he feel at ease? What would happen next? If only he had experienced this before. How would one judge the situation well enough to make a good decision if they were new to it? Heerak started to see people who were in relationships in a new light.

Heerak got into his car. From the moment he grabbed the wheel, up until he reached his destination, was the most nerve-wracking time for him. When he laid eyes on the other man's face, he was so busy grinning from ear to ear that he didn't have the time to be nervous anymore.

When time permitted and a computer or phone was accessible, Heerak would surf the internet. The most recently and frequently searched words were, "date ideas."

"To think there were so many places to go on a date- I missed out on a lot," he muttered to himself as he scoured the net. However, he hadn't been able to come up with anything good just yet.

First and foremost, Heerak and Doseon could usually only meet after one A.M. Most date locations were eliminated in this time fram . It was also not a great time to go anywhere—even more so because both of them would just get off of work, so he didn't even dare to plan a date that would be impossible and too difficult for them.

The limited time frame was the problem.

Quite frankly, this could be an excuse Heerak was making for himself, and that thought seemed increasingly plausible.

The places that were recommended in many of the date idea lists included places that he heard of before. Simply put, they were famous hot spots. The pictures uploaded with the reviews always had people in them—whether it was only a few people, or a very crowded place. People were always in the photos. Furthermore, some reviews

wrote that they didn't recommend a place on weekends, and attached a photo that was crowded with people.

Heerak pictured certain scenarios in his head as he saw those pictures.

As they walked down the street, Doseon could bump shoulders with someone. Maybe he wouldn't bump into them, exactly, but his shirt could brush past someone else, and when his partner let his eyes wander, he could accidentally meet eyes with a random person in the crowd.

Just the thought of it was awful.

Two days ago, Heerak went to the convenience store with Doseon. When the other said that he was feeling a bit hungry because he didn't eat properly as he was busy at work, Heerak thought of the convenience store. Back when he posted on social media about convenience store food, he remembered a comment that said, "Director, did you know? It's a fun experience to buy stuff at the convenience store and eat at the outdoor tables."

His companion said that he had enough money to pay for this at least, since the director always dropped him off, which saved him the money he would have used on a cab. Because Doseon brought up the topic of paying himself up, while attempting to pay at the store, Heerak loudly tried to dissuade him. The peace of the convenience store in the middle of the night was shattered instantly, thanks to Heerak's agitated voice. Ultimately, Heerak victoriously whipped out his card.

However, right after that, his partner ended up apologizing to the employee, saying, "We're sorry for making a ruckus."

Heerak wanted to express this as *ending up* apologizing because, to his standards, this was something that should never have happened, at least on his watch.

That image was etched in his head and replayed on a loop in his head. Heerak remembered when the convenience store employee said that it was all right while smiling, as the employee's eyes met his partner's and smiled, and how they exchanged greetings when they left.

He didn't want to appear annoyed in front of Doseon, so he maintained his grin the entire time they were in the store, even if he could feel his fingers clench from irritation. In the end, he couldn't

follow the recommendation from the comments, and he ended up wanting to escape that place.

Was this something to be so annoyed over? Was this something that warranted such uncontrollable anger, to the point that it nearly boiled over in his head?

He thought long and hard while lying on his bed after he got home, but he could only come up with one answer.

It was clear: what happened then was a common occurrence, and t wasn't something to get worked up over. To think that he would be grinding his teeth in anger until he fell asleep. The degree to which he was disturbed must mean there was something wrong with him; he felt insane.

Marking.

That was the only word that came to mind. It also happened to be the only word that could perfectly explain this situation. He grinned bitterly at the impossibility of it, but he couldn't erase that word so easily from his head.

He recalled the second night he spent with Doseon.

Heerak wanted to mark him. He also wanted to knot inside of him. The reason he hadn't acted on those thoughts wasn't because of his excellent self-control, it was because, despite his abnormal mental state, he remembered that his partner was not an omega. Knotting came with intense physical pain, so he held that desire in. His main concern was the immense and unimaginable pain that he would make the other go through.

Both marking and knotting—looking past those, one would also recall the dense blanket of pheromones left after sleeping in that room that night. Heerak brushed that thought off as well. Leaving aside the fact that the sex was pretty intense, they really went wild all night that night. Even if he somehow looked past the shocking events of that night, an even bigger problem happened every day.

He could explain the feelings he felt at the convenience store as marking. However, marking was completely impossible on a beta like Doseon. When he realized that, Heerak felt an unfathomable disappointment. He wasn't merely feeling let down; his disappointment was a dark and murky swamp.

None of this would have happened if he could just mark Doseon. The convenience store employee wouldn't have been able to speak at

all, Doseon wouldn't have had to reply, and he would have only looked at Heerak when he noticed his depressed mood.

It would have been so nice if that were the case.

Upon thinking that, he kicked his covers and jumped out of bed.

He stayed awake all night; he just couldn't bring himself to go to sleep at all.

Heerak thought having a date in such a crowded place would be meaningless because he was feeling so deranged. He could force himself to smile in front of that employee, but as time passed, his anxiety would spike.

It couldn't be that he actually had anger management issues, could it?

He could still joke about it and smirk at himself. Everything except for Doseon was the same in his life. His day-to-day life didn't change—that was, except for the fact that he was a complete lunatic when Doseon was involved. He couldn't gather his scattered thoughts.

Since this was Heerak's current state, Heerak tried not to imagine Doseon working. He stopped his thoughts when he imagined stripping off Doseon's white dress shirt, burying his lips underneath his shirt collar, and leaving a bite mark. He didn't even want to think about Doseon greeting guests; j ust the thought of it made his blood boil.

If I get any worse, I'll be quite the sight. My jealousy would probably get worse, and I'd behave like a freak.

It wasn't so hard to imagine that.

For example, what kind of food did Doseon serve, what kind of alcohol did he serve to whom, and what kind of orders did he receive? Alpha, beta, or omega, did anyone show any hint of being too flirtatious? Heerak could try to find out every little detail about Doseon's actions and any surrounding incidents from Manager Moon or Seokchan.

The fact that he thought this way was an issue. It was quite an enormous issue because it wasn't unrealistic for Heerak to make this kind of irresponsible request, and if he abused his power, he could easily achieve all of this.

He ruminated, and by the time he progressed from "I think I'm crazy" to "they should lock me up," he was in front of Hodie. Heerak

did not stop in front of Hodie today but stopped one block away, because he wanted to see Doseon's surprised face.

Heerak checked the time And saw that he had around 10 minutes before Doseon got off work. He always wanted to arrive at least 30 minutes before, but he never accomplished that. Today's reason was that he ran out of time, but the usual case was that he was making a fuss in front of his full-length mirror before sprinting out.

He parked on the side of the empty road and got off. He checked his appearance on the reflection on his window to see if he looked all right, and he double and triple-checked his outfit, making sure there weren't any new wrinkles that formed on the way over.

He was always this finicky lately.

He always carefully examined his appearance when he knew he was going to get photographed, or when he accepted a television appearance. It was because he knew that Doseon liked saving pictures and watched shows that the executive director was on. He didn't know which photos or shows Doseon would end up watching. So when he needed to sell his face anywhere, he paid more attention to his appearance than ever before. Of course, that didn't change when he went to meet Doseon.

"He's out, he's out," he said out loud, as though saying it out loud would confirm what he saw.

He saw Doseon from afar.

Heerak took a few deep breaths, inhaling and exhaling several times. As soon as he felt his anxiety ebb, he walked toward Doseon, as he needed to catch him before he crossed the street to the taxi stand.

"Doseon!" Heerak raced toward Doseon.

By the time Doseon flinched and slowly turned around, Heerak was right in front of him. Doseon blinked at the radiant face that seemed to illuminate despite the depth of the night.

"Director, you came again tonight?"

The surprise was a success, in its own way. Doseon appeared composed, but Heerak could read the surprise in his eyes.

Heerak chuckled and asked, "Why? You're not happy to see me?"

Doseon quickly shook his head. "No, I am, but—" Then he made a wary face and slowly continued. "You should rest after work, but you've recently been coming to see me when I've finished work. I feel bad about it, and I'm worried for you."

“You don’t need to feel that bad, but you can keep being worried for me. It feels nice to have you keep me in your thoughts. Oh, but don’t be too worried.”

The walk from the crosswalk to Heerak’s car took less than a minute, but Heerak insistently held Doseon’s hand. Every night, they held hands, yet Doseon looked up wide-eyed each time, and then dropped his head to hide the bashful look in his eyes.

Heerak was touchy-feely in a lot of ways, but he soon realized that Doseon’s favorite type of physical contact was holding hands. Since he knew that now, he could easily act on it. Whenever he could, Heerak grabbed Doseon’s hands, locked fingers, and brought their clasped hands up to his face to plant a kiss on the back of Doseon’s hands. Doseon would make his rare and faint smile. Doseon’s happiness was Heerak’s happiness, and because of that, Heerak wanted to keep doing things that Doseon liked.

The scent of Heerak’s pheromones drifted off of Doseon, who was standing close. Heerak couldn’t help but beam in delight. This was a positive point of having strong, superdominant pheromones.

The first time was unintentional; Heerak would even call it a mistake. He just happened to do it spontaneously.

While dropping Doseon off last time, Heerak gave him a farewell hug, and accidentally rubbed off some of his pheromones on the other man. He regretted it for a split second, and he was surprised that he didn’t keep them under control. However, when his scent wafted from Doseon, he felt a deep sense of satisfaction, and thought it was quite nice.

The *mistakes* continued.

When he realized that his scent on Doseon’s neck and hands were faint the very next day, he frowned. A faint sense of anxiety and displeasure wriggled in his heart, and when they parted that day, he wished Doseon sweet dreams and hugged him, releasing more pheromones than the other night without any reservations.

Being able to meet Doseon every day was recent.

Aside from a few times when he couldn’t make the time at all, Heerak was pretty much repeating this routine. He didn’t do it to publicly announce who Doseon was spending time with, nor was it to ward off anyone who might dare to try and hit on Doseon.

It was simply because Heerak felt strangely reassured when he could smell himself on Doseon; he felt like he was on cloud nine.

Although he was slightly concerned that he might cause Doseon some inconveniences, Heerak couldn't contain himself when he sent the other man home every night. It even felt like this was beyond the realm of his control.

Heerak sat in the driver's seat after seating Doseon in the passenger seat of his car. He started the engine and decided to take a spin around the area. Doseon looked stoic and stared straight ahead, and Heerak glanced to the side and asked, "What did you have to eat today?"

"Today Manager Moon treated us." Doseon paused and tilted his head. The small, transient smile looked somewhat sour. It was clearly a wry smile.

Heerak took quick glances at Doseon and asked, "Why?"

Doseon made a puzzled face and slowly muttered, "Normally we choose our snacks through a ladder game. The staff play rock, paper, scissors, and the winner assigns the numbers."

"Wow, I want to play too! How many menu choices do you have?"

"Around six or seven? If you came over and joined us, everyone would like that. The staff is always eagerly waiting for you to visit, but they mentioned that you haven't dropped by recently."

Laughing, Heerak felt generous enough to say a few empty words. "I should show my face there, I guess."

"They've always been like that, but starting a few days ago, my manager started to ask me directly if I had anything I wanted to eat. I was a bit thrown off, but the rest of the staff encouraged me to choose as well."

Well, aren't they quick on the uptake?

Heerak smiled dryly.

"So I mentioned the assorted fried foods and pancakes that I saw on my way to work, but I think that was a mistake."

"A mistake? Why? Did it taste bad?"

"No, you see, none of the stores nearby did deliveries. I didn't know that because a guest came and I had to leave the staff room, but one of my colleagues told me later. The manager went to buy a whole bag of food himself. I felt so sorry for him, and I regretted not mentioning something easily accessible, like pizza or fried chicken."

Upon hearing that, Heerak fell into thought.

It was easy to deliver a few bonuses through Seokchan. However, doing that was too obvious. Even if he gave a few incentives in the

past, if Heerak blatantly rewarded him, Doseon would receive even more care and consideration. Heerak thought that it was a good deal, but he knew Doseon would feel uncomfortable about it, and he was sure that Doseon was already receiving several glances and questions.

"So what if a manager goes out to buy his staff some food? It's fine, so don't feel so guilty about it." Doseon didn't look very convinced, but Heerak ignored it and asked his next question. His priority was to distract Doseon from thinking about the midnight snack. "Then you're not feeling hungry?"

"No, what about you?"

"I ate late tonight too. Are you tired?"

"I'm usually bright and awake at this time, but I know you're more tired than I am."

"I'm fine too. I don't have anything scheduled tomorrow morning for once, and I can sleep in until noon."

They chatted affectionately and rode into the dark road. Their dates these past few days were usually in the car, because Heerak didn't like when Doseon looked at someone else, or even when others looked at Doseon. Thus, to create a romantic mood in a closed, intimate setting, there was nothing better than going on a drive. They couldn't do anything at this time of day anyways—at least, that's what Heerak kept telling himself.

The Olympic Bridge, Chungdam Bridge, Youngdong Bridge, bridge, bridge, bridge—it was exactly what it sounded like: a "fun nighttime bridge tour!"

When was it again? It was when he drank with his friends. A friend who was dating a well-known actor snickered and complained that their only dates were at home or in the car, and yet they were all smiles. According to this friend, since it was easy to become unwilling to move at home if you needed to see your partner briefly, the better option was to go on a drive. His friend pretended to sob, asking his other friends if they understood his pain, but nobody there could relate—except Heerak.

There were a few among their group of friends who had casual meet-ups in their loneliness, but nobody there could really talk about being in love or in a romantic relationship. The feeling of one's heart pounding so hard it felt like it would burst, or feeling all fatigue melt

away when a person heard their love interest's voice—those were always someone else's story.

They said that people felt their hearts race while running or when placed in an extreme or scary situation. But if his heart felt like bursting whenever he saw someone he liked, seriously dating someone must be very difficult. How could he always be prepared to have his heart hammer in his chest every time they met?

Heerak only had silly thoughts like that when he heard the love stories of his friends and acquaintances, and had always made light of it to himself because he never understood their feelings well enough.

When Heerak heard his friend's "hardships," he had pitied his friend's situation. He didn't really know much about dating people, but Heerak thought it must be miserable to have such limited meeting locations.

Someone he liked. That was to say—if there was someone who Heerak would call *the apple of his eye*, there was no way Heerak would be satisfied with just going between his home and his car. Wouldn't he want to do a lot with that person? Like golfing, bowling, swimming; if his lover was fine with dangerous things, they could go snowboarding or scuba diving. Watching an opera or shopping would be good, too. In any case, he thought that being able to consistently do something together would be great.

When Heerak listed his hobbies as things he would like to do if he had a lover, his friends' opinions were split. A few agreed that sharing and enjoying hobbies together would be nice, while a few mocked him by laughing and saying, "Are you going to change up your workout with your lover depending on the season? You might as well change your goal from dating someone to entering the Olympics." Whether they scoffed at him or not, Heerak was determined to share at least two or three hobbies together with the person he liked.

Yet what was this situation he was now in?

He thought that maybe he should rant about that bridge night tour, just like his friend had.

Whenever he thought about his past self, he smiled bitterly. Of course he still stood by the thought that it would be nice if they could do a few things together, however, the question was whether he could stay composed throughout. In his head, he changed activities

and imagined doing a couple of things, but it wasn't easy. Whether it was the swimming pool or bowling alley—or going further, the opera house or the entire mall—if he rented them out for the day, Heerak could probably make it through a full 24 hours. Of course, that was on the premise that Doseon wouldn't feel uncomfortable with it.

This was why Heerak continued to use time as an excuse. Doseon's lifestyle didn't fit with his, so doing anything together during the day was difficult.

Starting from this morning, Heerak was determined to tell Doseon two things today.

He was going to act on one of them right now.

The moment he brought it up and Doseon graciously agreed to it, then Heerak wouldn't be able to use the excuse of time anymore.

Heerak slowly said, "Doseon, you know…"

"Yes?"

"I heard you said you wanted the night shift when you interviewed at Hodie."

"Yes, that's right."

"Can I ask why? Was it the salary?"

"There was that too, but more than that, I wanted a change. I quit my regular day job, but I also needed to earn some money to cover my expenses. I thought that if I repeated my routine of going out in the morning and coming back at night, that was no different from before. It was an impulse decision of wanting to break my usual lifestyle and habits."

Heerak made a muffled groan and pursed his lips.

It was a more difficult conversation to bring up than he anticipated. If it was for financial reasons, Heerak could probably talk his way through, but since that wasn't the case at all, bringing up his point wasn't easy.

No, I already decided on this—that I'm going to bring it up today, no matter what.

After making up his mind, Heerak stood by his resolution and continued, "I think if you started and ended work around the same time as me… so what I mean to say is that… we would be able to spend more time together than we are right now, and I think that would be amazing."

"Oh."

Heerak had no idea what he was saying. He was being utterly incoherent, and sounded exasperated while doing so. Heerak appreciated that Doseon seemed to understand as he nodded with a small, “Oh.”

“Right. I’m definitely not trying to push this on you, okay? It’s just my wishful thinking, that it would be nice—oh, but since I told you, I guess I can’t say there was no intention at all to compel you.”

Heerak somehow kept stitching together sentences as he clenched the steering wheel tighter. He threw nervous glances to the side when no answer returned, and he saw that Doseon was simply smiling. He continued to smile serenely while Heerak drove, disgruntled by this situation.

Why do I have to be driving? I need to kiss him right now.

In his dissatisfaction, Heerak kept peeking to the side, and the smile lasted longer than usual before it eventually faded away.

Doseon looked composed as usual and answered calmly, “I understand what you mean.” Then after a pause he continued, sounding apologetic, “But I think that’ll be a bit difficult to do.”

Heerak felt disheartened, despite admitting that he wasn’t trying to force Doseon to do anything. Was it because of the smile he saw just now? Heerak realized that he was waiting for a favorable answer.

This wasn’t the time to stay silent. Heerak was just about to say that he was fine, and that it was just a thought, but Doseon was quicker to continue, “The daytime has a lot of competition. Switching shifts from night to day is not that easy, but I will try putting in an application. I hope you won’t get your hopes up, though.”

“I see.” Heerak’s answer was short, and the gears in his head started working at full capacity.

This could easily be solved if Heerak put in a word to Manager Moon, but he thought that was wrong. If he did that, Doseon would be distressed by it, and Heerak couldn’t help reacting sensitively to how troubled Doseon would feel. It was pointless and a nuisance to have Doseon feel burdened just so Heerak could extend their time together and build their relationship. Doseon was already finding Heerak a bit difficult, and it would only be a hindrance to have these negative feelings pile up.

Anyways, that’s a problem I can solve on my end.

He made a note to himself to think of a few solutions, before glancing at Doseon.

According to Seokchan, the foremost reason that Manager Moon hired Doseon was that he was a beta. Although no employer explicitly wrote that they preferred to hire a beta, businesses that served alcohol were more inclined to hire betas in general. If a pheromone-related incident occurred between an alpha or omega employee and a drunk customer, it was more difficult to handle.

Doseon's baby face probably played a factor, too.

Case in point, Heerak used *baby-faced* to describe a man who was two years his elder. No matter how hard Heerak thought about it, Doseon's youthfulness was clearly a strength. At first, Heerak thought Doseon was strictly average and plain but that was not the case at all. Heerak had misjudged him. This was an objective truth, separate from the fact that Heerak couldn't think objectively because he was currently completely head over heels for Doseon.

Hodie didn't have an age restriction for their hires, but with Manager Moon and Heerak's direction, some candidates who just passed the age of twenty were sent messages of rejection. Although they preferred people with some maturity to them, Heerak thought this was the first time someone in their mid-30s was hired so quickly. The moment Manager Moon interviewed Doseon, he probably thought that age wasn't a problem at all.

Heerak was quite thankful for this decision. If Manager Moon hadn't selected Doseon, Heerak would have never met him. Heerak was especially thankful for Doseon's young appearance, since that meant that he could meet this man

Heerak didn't know when he started to think like that.

* * *

Tonight's bridge tour ended in success yet again. When he went on a drive with Doseon, a couple hours always flew by. Heerak checked the time and saw that the sun would rise soon. These days, he was always resentful that the sun rose so early in the summer.

At first, Heerak was shocked at the narrow roads, but now he maneuvered through them skillfully. The street was lined on both sides with bars and pubs, but considering the time, not many had their signs on.

Going a bit further took them to a motel district. Here, the neon signs were still flashing brightly. Heerak clicked his tongue in

indignation at this point. This was probably what one would call a crime-ridden neighborhood. Past the bars and the motels, the residential neighborhood with worn-down apartments appeared, and one of those apartments was where Doseon called home.

He always thought, *I have a lot of empty rooms, and I live closer to Hodie*.

He didn't know if it was a good thing or not, but the things he was itching to say never left his mouth. Although he had probably lost his mind, Heerak seemed to still have a thread of logic somewhere. He tried to reason with himself that if he ever said these things out loud, then the burden he would give to Doseon would go over the current threshold.

As soon as he got off, Doseon bid him goodbye. "Thank you as always, Director. I think I'm able to go home comfortably thanks to you."

"It would have been nice if you addressed me with my name, though," Heerak said, half-jokingly and half sincerely.

Doseon knit his brows, but he probably couldn't bring himself to say that in his right mind yet.

Heerak grinned and pulled in the blankly standing Doseon into a hug. Doseon didn't refuse, as he seemed to have gotten used to this almost-daily ritual.

Heerak patted Dosoen's back and whispered in his ear, "You're not sick of me always driving you around in circles before I drop you off?"

"No, that never crossed my mind before," Doseon answered straightforwardly.

Heerak smiled contentedly and tightened his grip.

Finally it was time for him to say the last thing that he decided to say today. This was more difficult to bring up than the matter about moving up Doseon's work hours, and he kept feeling overwhelmed with an inexplicable tingling sensation.

"Doseon."

"Yes?"

"Tomorrow—no, it's today now. It's Thursday today."

"It is."

"That means you don't have to work today."

"You're right."

“So, do you have anything you have to do today, or…?” Heerak trailed off and bit his lip. A frown scrunched up his fair forehead; his face was the only outlet for all of his annoyance. He was quite relieved that Doseon wouldn’t be able to see the face he was currently making.

Hey! That’s not how you wanted to say it! Why’re you asking if he has something to do today? What’re you going to do about how annoyed you’ll feel if he says he has something to do? Do you think you’ll be able to sleep well at night? You were just going to ask if he wanted to or not! Why can’t you do this one thing?! What was the point of practicing this in front of the mirror, then?! Geez, you blockhead! You foolish idiot!’

Was it because he drifted off mid-sentence?

Doseon seemed to wait for Heerak to continue talking, but when he realized that Heerak wasn’t going to continue, he must have felt that something was off. Doseon tilted his head to the side while still in Heerak’s arms and replied, “I don’t have anything today.”

“Really? Whoa.” Heerak buried his face in Doseon’s shoulder, and let out a sigh of relief. “Doseon, did you know you just saved a man?”

“What? I did?”

“Yep. Anyways, that’s not why I brought that up. See, what I really wanted to ask was—”

“Yes?”

Heerak pulled away from Doseon slowly. Heerak locked eyes with the other man, who looked serious. Upon seeing that face, more anxiety swelled up in Heerak than before.

“If it’s alright with you, would you like to come over to my place tonight?”

Heerak sounded like a nervous wreck, and thought his voice even cracked at the end. This was the worst; the only thing he could do was try his best to maintain a semblance of a proper smile.

Doseon blinked a few times and asked, perplexed, “Right now?”

“Yeah,” Heerak answered while nodding, and Doseon looked even more puzzled. He looked as if he couldn’t quite comprehend Heerak’s words, and seeing this, Heerak’s barely maintained composure shattered instantly.

Heerak blurted out whatever came to mind. “I don’t have an ulterior motive, but… what was it again? I’m not saying that I’m going to do anything, or that I won’t lay a finger on you—wait, that’s

complete bullshit. Scratch that. Forget that I even said that. I just… I thought it was too bad to part ways now, I guess? I hate to see you go. So I just thought that it would be nice if we could spend more time together, or something like that—oh! I think it'll be nice to go to your house too, but the bed at my place is bigger, and it'll be better to sleep—Oh! And by sleeping, I don't mean it in a dirty way. Gah…. what the heck."

What should he think to comfort himself? That it was good that he didn't mix in profanities? That no matter how embarrassed he was, he didn't avert his eyes?

Heerak could feel his face burning up. He was sure that he was red down to his neck, and h e really felt like he was losing his mind. He couldn't understand or remember most of what he said. Heerak wanted to dig a hole for himself and hide; he broke out into such a sweat that he couldn't stand straight.

Heerak rubbed his cheek with his palm and sighed, and Doseon dazedly mumbled, "Director, I wanted to ask something because I don't think I understand."

"What is it?"

"Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think it only takes 10 minutes to get to your house from Hodie by car."

"Yes, it does. You're right."

"Then why did you come all the way out here? You should have mentioned this earlier."

"Well, that's because—!" Heerak accidentally yelled, so he stopped himself. He was in such a panic while Doseon remained too composed for the situation. Their contrasting reactions made Heerak feel bewildered—he didn't know what to do with himself. "Well, that's because I missed the right timing to say it ."

There really was only one reason.

Heerak had several chances to ask, but he couldn't find the courage to bring it up. He thought that saying it while facing Doseon would be better than while he was sitting at the wheel. Looking back on it, it was the right call. If he asked while driving, he might have stepped on the gas pedal and sped recklessly in embarrassment and agitation. It was the perfect equation for a car accident.

"Executive Director," Doseon said, looking at Heerak with a stoic face.

"Yes?"

“Director, you’re a very charming person, although you probably already know that.”

The heat in his face that started to subside suddenly spiked up. Heerak felt that he got a bit hotter. There were no tears in his eyes, but he felt the corners of his eyes burn. It was the first time he felt this kind of temperature.

“W-what the hell? What’s with you so suddenly?”

Unlike the utterly flustered Heerak, Doseon remained unruffled.

“I just really wanted to tell you that. Oh, was that rude of me to say?”

Heerak promptly shook his head. “No, no. Nothing like that. I’m happy. If you think of me that way.”

Heerak rubbed his forehead, trying to cool down his fever. It was practically tropical outside, and the additional heat from his body felt suffocating.

Doseon then whispered softly, “I don’t know why you couldn’t find the right timing, but please feel free to ask me next time. I think it’ll be better if you could tell me in advance. That way, I can make sure to clear out as many of my Thursdays as I can for you. If I may add to that, you don’t always have to invite me over just on Thursdays.”

Heerak’s mouth gaped open with shock. He was struggling and panicking over saying this one thing, yet Doseon was able to say it all without so much of a hitch—Heerak thought that this was unfair.

“I feel bad that you’re the only one trying to match my schedule. Do you usually rest on weekends?”

“What? Oh, yeah! Most of the time, I do.”

“I’m fine as long as I can head out by six p.m. If I can stay on time, I can surely have enough time to continue meeting and spending time with you like—Director?”

Heerak snatched the man in front of him into his arms and pulled him in tight. “Did you know that you’re amazing?” he said in an awestruck voice.

“Sorry? I am?” Doseon asked, confused,

“Yes, Doseon. You said everything that I struggled to say so easily that I’m pretty envious of you.”

Doseon seemed to think about that for a bit and answered shyly, “I think it’s fine for you to be a bit nervous, like I am.”

“What? You’re nervous?”

That's what I've felt today, more than you can ever imagine. Heerak left the latter part as a thought. If he added that, his already ruined image would degrade even further.

"I'm always tense. I think maybe I get overly nervous, but before I even get to think, I answer automatically to what I hear, and if I think the answer is lacking, I add stuff too. That's the limit of my thoughts. Every moment feels like a test of my concentration."

Heerak chuckled, and squeezed the man in his arms tighter. Maybe this person seemed composed on the outside, but was actually very timid.

The second time they slept together, Doseon had mentioned being nervous.

"My head doesn't work properly when I get nervous. I freeze up, over-think things, adding meaning to things, and checking my appearance. I don't have even an iota of leisure to do that. Now that I mention it, even though I'm usually like this, I'm sure there have been times when I've been particularly stiff in front of you."

So he was aware of it.

Heerak answered with laughter in his voice, "You have. I've actually felt pretty bummed."

"I'm sorry. I'm really, really sorry, but whenever I'm like that, I'd like you to know that I'm at least two times—no, several times—more nervous than you think I am."

Delight made Heerak's face grow brighter. "What do you do if you're always so nervous like that?"

"I know. I wish I got better, too."

Heerak then realized that this was not the time to be standing around. Now that the long-awaited permission was in his grasp, all that was left was to take Doseon home.

He released his embrace with the intent to seat Doseon back in the car. But as soon as they locked eyes, Doseon said something he didn't expect. "Then, I might as well drop by my house for a moment."

Before he could ask, Heerak shot a questioning glance. Doseon made a brief smile and answered quietly, "Because I'm staying over at your house. You let me borrow your clothes last time, but they were quite loose on me, and I think it would be better if I brought some of my own clothes and some bathroom supplies."

"Oh."

That was fine with Heerak. Heerak nodded and said, “Sure, go ahead.”

Doseon replied, “I won’t take very long,” and turned toward his apartment.

When Doseon disappeared into the front door, Heerak couldn’t stand it anymore, and he sank into a squat.

He was told that he was charming.

“Wow.”

He ran his fingers through his hair several times and grinned like a fool. How could he keep being so foolish like this? He felt like he made all the mistakes he could possibly make today.

Even so, Doseon had called him charming.

“This is really quite something. It even hurts.”

Heerak roughly massaged his chest with his hands.

He finally understood. His heart felt like bursting.

* * *

This image was no different than a professional photo album.

Seokchan met with several models for commercials, and visited the photoshoot a few times, but each time, the executive director came to mind. He wondered if they really needed to pour in thousands of dollars to hire a model.

In the beginning, Seokchan thought of it jokingly, but nowadays, he was seriously considering suggesting that the executive director shoot an ad. He knew that the director would simply laugh at him and tell him that he was spewing nonsense. The executive director was already selling his image to the public through interviews, social media, and even television programs. As time passed, however, it became more and more apparent that the best model for the company was the executive director.

In any case, the admirable executive director was sitting at his desk, eyes fixed on the monitor. The executive director, cleanly dressed in a suit while sincerely staring at the screen, looked so radiant and elegant from all angles that anyone would be in awe.

However, the content of the website that the director was looking at with gleaming eyes was really quite inappropriate for the time of day, and for being in the office.

The executive director was in the middle of enthusiastically shopping for lubricants.

It was only ten in the morning.

"Executive Director," Seokchan said with difficulty. Heerak's shoulders flinched, and he lifted his head.

"I guess I was too into it."

"Yes, you forgot that I was standing right next to you, didn't you?"

"So you see. Hm, I think that this time, scentless would be good. Flavored lube is a bit too much."

"Is that so?" After responding to information that he really did not want to know, Seokchan let out a deep sigh.

More than once, he caught Heerak reading the reviews for different lubes on an adult goods website. At first, he was horrified, and badgered Heerak with, "What are you thinking so early in the morning? Don't you think this is inappropriate to do in the office?"

Heerak snickered and retorted, "Is there anyone else but you who can come into this office without an appointment?"

Seokchan could only keep his mouth shut after that.

After that day, the executive director started to act strangely.

By *that day*, Seokchan meant the day that the executive director ground his teeth, determined that he would successfully close the negotiation with Doseon Yoon.

Heerak never told him any specifics. When Seokchan casually hinted that Heerak was being secretive, the answers that came back were ambiguous. Perhaps Heerak thought that this wasn't the time to tell Seokchan the details. It also seemed that Heerak himself did not know what he should tell Seokchan, or if that wasn't the case, maybe he didn't want to tell Seokchan at all .

Seokchan asked him point-blank how the negotiation went.

Heerak gave a very terse answer: he failed.

The moment he heard Seokchan realized things were going down an unforeseen path, was when Heerak's eyes were shining too brightly for someone reporting a failure.

Heerak's pride was second to none, so an upset Heerak talking about a failure could never have a look like that in his eyes; he would be seething. He would look like his blood pressure shot through the roof, and utter some curses—that was the executive director that Seokchan knew well.

Since that day, unimaginable things kept happening.

To start off, Heerak became immersed in shopping. Until now, he left everything to his stylist, and was the guy who flippantly argued

that anything would look good on an excellent model like himself, and that he could read one document in the time he spent shopping. Seeing the director personally heading to the luxury goods stores and making his rounds to purchase clothing was a sight that was hard to get used to. He, of course, did not believe that Heerak was relieving his stress through retail therapy. The executive director probably didn't say it to fool Seokchan. It was probably just an excuse.

Besides, Heerak was strict with time. He abhorred people who didn't come on time to appointments, and he detested wasting time waiting for someone. Heerak wasn't the type of person to ask others to do what he hated, so he was always right on time. Therefore, unless there were special circumstances, the life of accompanying the director as his personal secretary was like hell. Seokchan was always on edge because of the director, who would come down ten minutes earlier than he promised.

The first day that the director did not come down even though it was past the time he should have, Seokchan thought that either the world was ending, or something terrible had happened to Heerak.

There was no time to waste in calling Heerak, so Seokchan anxiously barged into the penthouse apartment.

Heerak was in his dressing room. Unlike his worst fears, his boss's face was perfectly fine, which at least was a relief. Well, to be exact, Heerak didn't look completely fine. Heerak's face, as he put one suit or the other against his body in front of the full-length mirror, was quite dark.

Heerak said that there wasn't anything that he felt was *the one* today. What else could Seokchan have said to that? After careful consideration, he could only reply with an "I see".

That wasn't all. Heerak was sending photos of his outfits to someone as if he was reporting for duty. Seokchan thought he was uploading them to social media at first, but that wasn't the case at all.

When Seokchan thought about who Heerak's certain somebody was, there was only one person who he could think of. Of course, he wasn't planning on bringing it up to Heerak before he told Seokchan himself. It was a daily scene for the director to nervously clutch his phone before looking relieved the next moment when he saw a reply.

There were other things besides that, but Seokchan would need to prepare to have a headache just bringing them up.

Initially, Seokchan had a hard time when the director randomly asked to cancel appointments on his schedule, but now, it was completely the opposite. Heerak was more focused on work; rather than being focused, it seemed like Heerak was trying to do all his work in one go. The workaholic executive director was recently in a rush to take as many days off as possible; if he could completely free up Thursdays specifically, Heerak would do anything to make it happen. Heerak would occasionally go to work on weekends, and even did overtime that he usually hated.

The executive director became different.

Seokchan had an inkling of why he had changed.

It was beyond an inkling—he was 100% certain about it. Even if, internally, he made fun of Heerak when he looked like the world was ending from the shock of sleeping with a beta, Seokchan never said it out loud. It wasn't because of his loyalty to the executive director that he didn't dare put those words on his lips.

Heerak would likely tell Seokchan himself sometime in the future.

Seokchan wondered what kind of face Heerak would make as he confessed. Seokchan had great expectations, and he could only hope for that day to come soon.

However, today, Seokchan needed to forget about waiting, and mention it first.

He thought it wasn't the best idea, but he had no other choice.

"Director, I was hoping you could take some time for me right now."

Heerak finally took his eyes off the screen and looked at the loitering Seokchan. "Oh, did you have something to say to me?"

"Yes."

"I just realized that I didn't tell you to take a seat. Sorry, I'm a bit out of it these days."

"It's all right."

Heerak got up and sat on the sofa. After lighting the cigarette between Heerak's fingers, Seokchan seated himself on the couch on the right of the center seat.

"Executive Director, these days, whenever I visit Hodie, Manager Moon keeps telling me about Mr. Yoon, about how he was doing today and yesterday and such." Seokchan pushed his silver-framed glasses up the bridge of his nose. "I won't ask why Manager Moon is being like this all of a sudden, since you probably already know why."

Heerak let out a low chuckle. He didn't seem offended, but he probably wasn't feeling that great either.

Seokchan went on, after thinking for a moment. "It's very easy to keep a specific person quiet. However, silencing a group of an unknown number is more difficult, but I'm sure you know that as well."

"I do," Heerak neatly admitted. He simply kept smoking, his leisurely smile lingering on his face. After noticing that the director didn't want to say any more, Seokchan let out a sigh.

"I'm thinking that the rumor has already spread around the Hodie staff. In that case, it won't be long until it reaches the ears of the general manager, managing director, and the chairman. How should I respond to their calls?"

As soon as Seokchan finished, Heerak replied succinctly, "I don't know anything."

Seokchan bowed his head slightly. "Understood."

"It'll be annoying, but I hope you can keep it up."

"Why would I find it annoying? I'm rather reassured on my end."

"Of course. As soon as you say that you don't know, they'll contact me."

Unlike his smiling face, he sounded dull. "I don't like dragging things on, but I have no choice for now, because I don't have the answer yet. No, I do have the answer, but I should say that it's not quite precise, so that's why I want to extend my time as long as possible."

You haven't found the answer? Even though you're choosing the lube yourself? Seokchan wondered if Heerak expected him to believe that.

Seokchan pressed his lips together to stop his bottom lip from quivering, as he couldn't say that out loud. Upon close inspection, the executive director was probably just trying to avoid the topic, since Seokchan was charged with cleaning up after all kinds of things thus far. Why was the director reluctant to tell details this time? It seemed like his boss sneakily pulled out whenever *that person* was the topic. This wasn't the first time Seokchan had this feeling.

No, to be exact, he felt that Heerak wanted to keep Seokchan out of it all lately; therefore, Seokchan couldn't easily bring the topic up.

"Seokchan," Heerak called out after a brief moment of silence.

Seokchan, who was absently watching the cigarette butt being put out in the ashtray, responded “yes” reflexively, and lifted his chin. When there were others, Heerak called him “Mr. Min,” but when they were alone, Heerak teasingly and amicably called him “Mr. Secretary.” It had been a while since Heerak addressed Seokchan by his first name; it was a sign that what Heerak was about to say wasn’t very light.

“Have you ever thought about wanting to knot or mark someone?”

“Sorry?”

Seokchan was wondering what Heerak was about to say, but this was beyond his expectations. The type of question itself was surprising.

Considering the length of time they worked together, the two became familiar enough that they could share very personal stories with each other. However, there was definitely a boundary to that, and this question leaped beyond the bounds of that fine line they established. Seokchan thought he wouldn’t be surprised at whatever Heerak could throw his way, but the reality was tougher than that.

Heerak was being extremely serious. Seokchan couldn’t hide his nervousness, and slowly answered, “I’ve never felt that before.”

“I have.”

“I see.”

“But as you know very well, marking and knotting wouldn’t really work on him.”

“Right.”

Seokchan could understand the subject of the conversation right away, even though the man in question wasn’t specified. Seokchan was sending signals that he understood, but his thoughts were a chaotic mess.

It wouldn’t really work on him.

Was Heerak shocked that he thought of marking and knotting despite knowing it wouldn’t work? Seokchan was more shocked that the executive director even wanted to do those things to someone.

“That day I was in such a shock that I thought that maybe I needed to get some treatment or a consultation. It’s scary, you know, knowing that I suddenly became like this.”

Seokchan barely managed to answer. He felt like his throat was parched. “Should I book an appointment with a specialist sometime

soon?”

“No, it’s fine, it’ll probably be useless.” After a pause, Heerak added in a barely audible voice, “And that’s not important right now, anyway.”

Heerak rubbed his chin, and y smiled lightly.

It was a face that was hard to describe. Heerak looked like he was in deep thought, but at the same time, he looked like a weight had been lifted off his chest. Seokchan could merely stare at the face that was tangled with complicated emotions, but he could only wait for the other man to continue talking.

“Seokchan.”

“Yes?”

“You know that I’ve never dated anyone properly before,” Heerak said in a much lighter voice.

Hearing that, Seokchan relaxed a bit and answered in his usual, straight forward way. “It’s hard to believe, but it's true.”

“I also like things with certainty, to the point that I don’t touch anything I don’t understand with a six-foot pole. But this time is a bit different. The reason I’m taking time to savor this feeling is that, beyond wanting to act wisely, I want to cherish this moment for a longer amount of time. I start thinking about a lot of things when I spend time with that person, and while I’m with him, I think it would be good to just do everything I can, all at once. Because, you know, I’ll throw all apprehensions to the wind later on.”

“You do have a tendency to be like that,” Seokchan replied nonchalantly.

Heerak snickered, finding that amusing. “But still, I think about that sometimes when I’m with him.”

Seokchan wanted to pick at the *sometimes,* but he pushed that urge down. He had an idea of what Heerak would say next.

“I think that, maybe, this is how it feels to be in a legitimate relationship with someone.”

That was it. He saw this coming.

Seokchan bent forward in a deep bow as soon as the words left Heerak’s mouth.

“I truly wish you congratulations. A day like this has really come.”

Heerak’s eyes widened, and he burst out laughing and slapped his armrest. “What the heck? Is it okay to be congratulated already? I didn’t even confess to him yet.”

Seokchan straightened his back and replied briefly, “Of course. A confession shouldn’t be such a big issue. I almost think that there’s nothing else that I would congratulate you on. Personally, my heart felt more moved than at the grand opening of your mall.”

“What the heck?” Heerak ruffled his hair. He looked bashful, and every time his fingers traveled roughly across his scalp, his soft brown hair fluttered about smoothly.

“How did I end up like this?”

“Doesn’t everyone start off like this? Even though I have no intention of ruining your happy thoughts, it’s already game over when you think, *‘What’s going on? What am I doing?’*”

Heerak’s grin grew as he heard the slightly teasing voice. “Really?”

“That’s what I think.”

“You haven’t been wrong before.”

“I’m sure I’m right this time, too,” Seokchan said with confidence. “Don’t I have more experience than you in romance?”

Seokchan even shrugged his shoulders and Heerak pouted, “Are you bragging?”

Heerak laughed. “Yes, I thought I’d show off a bit. The opportunity doesn’t come around very often.” The hands that disturbed his hair slowly dropped. Heerak lightly rubbed his smiling face with his palms and sighed. “Seokchan.”

“Yes?”

“Don’t you think Doseon will be bothered by this while he’s working? Manager Moon buttering up to you probably means he already went through Doseon, and I heard the same thing directly from Doseon.”

Seokchan nodded. “That’s true. It seems like Manager Moon pulled Doseon aside to ask Doseon directly. This is just my opinion, but I don’t think it’ll end as a one-off thing. It’s not only Manager Moon. Every staff member at Hodie had probably asked Doseon about it at least once.”

Heerak crumpled his face at that. “God fucking damn it. Why are people so interested in other people’s love lives? Must be nice to be so free. I’m so damn jealous of them. Maybe I’ll just go and stir shit up.”

“Executive Director, did you just say *love life?*”

Heerak cleared his throat to hide his embarrassment. It was really too bad that Seokchan couldn't laugh out loud. He laughed inwardly and said, "I ran into Doseon briefly not too long ago. He said with a smile that he was fine. I didn't tell him to do anything in particular, but I think he will take care of things well on his own. But I'm not too worried about that, either,"

At Heerak's answer, Seokchan couldn't stop the corners of his lips from curling up. "You asked how anyone could trust someone unconditionally, but I still remember it like it was yesterday when you were determined to keep him quiet by ultimately giving him something material."

"Oh, geez!"

Heerak's cheeks flushed red in embarrassment, and he glared up at Seokchan, but his secretary continued without so much as a blink.

"I know what you're worried about. Doseon might find it bothersome, of course. Maybe he didn't show it in front of me, but he didn't seem to be stressed out about it. Rather, he said that he was smiling cluelessly, and telling the curious that he didn't know anything. I laughed a bit thanks to that."

Seokchan didn't know why, but Heerak's face turned a bit ambiguous. That bothered Seokchan slightly, but now that they were on that topic, he wanted to end the conversation.

"But more than that, shouldn't you be worried about something else, Director?"

Heerak narrowed his eyes and tilted his head to one side. "And what's that?"

"Before I answer that, allow me to badger you about one thing. Director, you should feel sorry for Doseon."

"What? Me? Why should I?"

This was a stronger reaction than anything else he was told, and Heerak's nicely shaped eyes twitched as he snapped.

"Yes, you, Director. What's up with that? Those pheromones, I mean." Seokchan flinched at this attitude, but he replied steadfastly.

Heerak appeared to be lost for words. He must have felt quite guilty because he even let out a groan.

"Doseon didn't seem to know about it at all, and it was absolutely reeking in here," said Seokchan.

Heerak rubbed his cheeks and retorted, exasperated, "I-it's not that strong, no? It's not that much!"

“You’re the only one who thinks that, Director. I didn’t decide to badger you about this today for no reason. If you can’t feel the gravity of the pheromones, this can’t not be a big deal,” Seokchan mumbled with a rigid face.

Heerak felt like he needed to step back in retreat. True—if Heerak had a conscience, he couldn’t continue arguing. The pheromones wrapped around Doseon were clearly at an intensity that disgusted others.

“If he wasn’t surrounded by those pheromones, Manager Moon wouldn’t have pulled Doseon aside to dig around for answers. Imagine that one day, your employee comes to work covered in superdominant pheromones. On top of that, that employee looks quite *friendly* with the executive director these days. Superdominant alphas aren’t common, so it would be easy to guess whose superdominant scent Doseon was carrying. Don’t you agree?”

Heerak looked downcast at the smooth voice. “Well, I guess…”

“That’s why Manager Moon would probably feel a lot better knowing something, than if he doesn’t. If I were in his shoes, I would do the same.” Seokchan smirked bitterly at the lifeless face. “I even felt a little bad for Manager Moon. He could clearly tell that they were your pheromones, so he couldn’t reprimand Doseon to deodorize the scent. But even so, he couldn’t let Doseon walk around smelling like that. Don’t you think Manager Moon would be concerned every day?”

Heerak made a noncommittal noise.

“Doseon is the same, and he must have felt pretty frustrated, because he asked me when he pulled me aside .”

Heerak’s eyes gleamed. “What did he ask?”

“It seems like Manager Moon is keeping him in the prep room. He seems concerned about that, plus, he’s very worried because whenever he goes anywhere these days, people jump away from him like the sea parting for Moses.”

“What?!” Laughter burst out of Heerak’s mouth.

Seokchan pushed up his glasses and said gravely, “Director, this isn’t funny. What if Doseon gets randomly stopped by the police and is questioned?”

Heerak looked displeased and frowned. “Is that possible?”

“It could happen—if it's that high a level of pheromones.”

The parting sea was probably not a hyperbole; Seokchan was sure that he would instinctively take a step back if he sensed that level of pheromones near him.

Seokchan knitted his brows. The ferocious scent of a superdominant alpha was slathered on as a threat, and a warning. It was to the point that he feared he would get chased down and have his life threatened if he did so much as brush by Doseon's shirt, and he could easily imagine how horrified someone who encountered those pheromones would be without any sort of advance notice.

"What did you say to Doseon?"

"What could I say to him? I only suggested that he ask you. I didn't have the heart to return Doseon's smile because I felt my conscience being pricked."

Heerak's face suddenly became complicated; he made a similar face earlier. As Seokchan looked at him in bemusement, Heerak asked in a reluctant voice, "Does Doseon smile easily in front of you?"

"Director. I'm saying this in advance, but I hope you won't pointlessly direct any feelings of jealousy to an innocent person like me."

"It's not like that! I'm just asking because I'm curious," Heerak said in an agitated voice.

Seokhan mumbled, "He does smile well. Not just me though—doesn't he always approach everyone with a smile?"

Heerak's face suddenly became devoid of all emotions. Seokchan was so taken aback at the abrupt expressionless face, he stopped talking. Heerak looked like that when something was bothering him. Seokchan had no idea why he suddenly saw this face again after so many years.

Heerak urged his secretary, who clammed up as soon as he read the atmosphere, to continue.

Seokchan decided to say a few things that came to mind, treading carefully. "He has a good reputation among the customers for being friendly and efficient. That's probably why Manager Moon is bitter that he can't put Doseon on the floor. Oh, Director. Did you happen to read the documents that I gave you before?"

"Just the first page. I didn't feel like reading the rest."

Seokchan nodded, and told Heerak the contents of the file that Heerak didn't get to read. "You know that Doseon was in the sales

team at his last workplace, right? He's still a legend at his former company. When Doseon handed in his resignation letter, the company's board of directors all threw themselves at him to try to get him to reconsider."

Seokchan kept glancing at Heerak while he spoke. Heerak's face did not change as he listened. Saying that he wasn't feeling pleased was an understatement; it was beyond displeasure. Heerak was suppressing a feeling overwhelmingly deeper than mere annoyance or irritation.

Heerak, who was reclined and still in his chair, slowly leaned forward. When Seokchan saw that Heerak had a new cigarette in his hand, Seokchan automatically pulled out his lighter. Despite the swift movement, Heerak lit his own cigarette. Seokchan slowly moved back his hand, left hanging.

"Remind me what my afternoon schedule is like."

A frigid voice cut through the silence in the room.

Wondering what made the director feel so sour, Seokchan answered the question by listing off the information in his head. "Nothing too special, but you have a dinner scheduled with Mr. Park, the general manager of Young-Lim Construction."

"Push that back."

"Director, you've already rescheduled this appointment. If you do that again, then—"

Heerak waved his hand, indicating that he didn't need to hear anymore. The trail of smoke from his cigarette followed his movements.

"Just do something about it. I know you can do it."

Seokchan rubbed his face roughly. The parade of refusals that Heerak had raised consistently came back when Seokchan least expected it.

It couldn't be helped; Heerak was already planning to not follow his schedule. Seokchan didn't know what kind of insult he would hear, but for now, Heerak's terse answers were scarier to him.

"Understood."

There was no time to lose then, as Seokchan needed to contact the other party as soon as possible. Thanks to the director writing a new chapter in his life called *romance*, he needed to call to cancel meetings a lot, so Seokchan reached the bottom of the jar of his

excuses. He would probably need to grab a few shrewd employees to help him come up with something different.

Before Seokchan got up, he carefully asked, “Director, why are you suddenly in such a bad mood? If I said something that made you upset—”

Heerak waved his hands again. It was good that it wasn’t Seokchan’s fault for Heerak being upset.

After a long silence, Heerak answered, “I don’t know want to say. I think I’ll get even more pissed off if I do.”

***

One hour later.

Heerak sat on the bench in the front yard of Hodie.

It was the same spot from back then.

He didn’t go inside Hodie. Instead, he told the staff at the front who recognized him to not alert anyone of his presence, and he privately contacted Manager Moon to ask him to send Doseon out.

Not long after, he saw the man he was so desperately waiting for. He amazed himself that he could recognize him in one glance from afar, even though others and himself had called Doseon average looking. Now, his eyes were affixed to him like nothing else mattered.

Heerak stood up.

One step, two steps. His slow steps gained speed. Not long after, he stood in front of Doseon.

“Executive Director? What brings you so suddenly, hngh…!”

Instead of answering, he reached out. Heerak spun on his heels as soon as he grabbed the other’s wrist. He walked quickly, as if being chased by something, and Doseon matched his pace.

They arrived at the parking lot.

Heerak opened the doors to the back seat without hesitation, pushed Doseon in, and slammed the door shut.

A long finger reached out to touch Doseon’s face, who looked slightly out of it from the suddenness of the situation. Heerak wrapped his hands on both cheeks, lifted them slightly, and brought his lips down.

It was a relentless kiss.

As they changed angles, their lips made wet noises. Doseon’s two hands that were frozen midair lightly grabbed the closest things to

him, which happened to be Heerak's arms. As if reacting to the hands laid above his elbow, Heerak poured deeper kisses, as if hungrily devouring the other's lips.

"Director." Doseon sounded dry, perhaps because his fluids were all stolen away by Heerak. Heerak didn't respond, but instead, he lightly sucked and pulled on Doseon's bottom lip. Unlike his assertive, searching lips, the fingers that stroked Doseon's cheeks were gentle.

Doseon's shoulders trembled at the kisses that landed everywhere on his face and barely managed to speak. "Why are you mad? Did something happen?"

"I'm not mad."

Doseon, who was silent for a moment, whispered calmly, "I have never lied to you, a nd I don't plan on doing so in the future, so I hope you are also honest with me."

Heerak, who continued to kiss Doseon as he pleased, stopped when he heard that.

They locked eyes with each other at a distance where they could share their warmth if they leaned in slightly. Heerak averted his gaze first, away from Doseon's resolute eyes.

"Director?" Doseon gently called to the sighing man, who shifted his gaze slowly to the side.

Heerak looked reluctant about something and made a face, lips squirming uncomfortably. Doseon didn't intend to keep pressing on, so he quietly peered at the other's pensive face.

"I heard that you smile readily for other people." The silence was broken by a curt voice.

"Sorry?" Doseon's eyes widened at the unexpected answer.

Heerak scoffed and muttered to himself, "But why is it so difficult for me to see your smile even once?"

"Is that why you're mad?" Doseon asked in a composed tone as if to confirm.

"Yeah, I'm acting childish! Are you happy now?" Heerak's face became stained red in an instant. He yelled in a voice that perfectly matched his face, which was a tangle of embarrassment and anger.

"I didn't say that."

"Your face said it!" Heerak let out a short and exasperated laugh. He thought that this situation was preposterous.

Doseon faintly smiled, as if infected by Heerak's own smile. "Did I really not smile that much?"

"Are you kidding me? Put your hand on your heart and think about what kind of face you're always making!" Heerak grumbled.

Doseon lowered his eyes, troubled, and quietly whispered, "I'm sorry. I must ask for your understanding about this. I'm usually not the type to get nervous when it comes to most things. I guess you can say I usually have nerves of steel."

Heerak narrowed his eyes. He just heard something very strange: this person looked like he was suffering from anxiety every day, however, he said that he had nerves of steel; this was beyond strange.

"But I only become like this in front of you." Doseon looked at him with clear and honest eyes.

Heerak felt an unexpected pain. His heart felt like it was exploding.

"I told you before that I get deathly nervous, but only in front of you."

Heerak stared, captivated by the other's gaze.

Only in front of me.

That was what this person just said.

He shivered. The feeling that overwhelmed his heart was quite similar to when he first thought about knotting and marking Doseon, even though, just moments before, he couldn't stand his irritation.

He couldn't stand it, so he lunged at Doseon.

The negative emotion that churned his insides and stirred about turbulently in his heart was completely gone—all because of one word from Doseon. Rage, wrath, and all kinds of unpleasant feelings were completely gone and replaced with overflowing, heart-pounding feelings.

"I don't know what to do with myself when I'm in front of you. I told you before, but my mind completely stops working. It's not that I don't smile, it's that I can't. I end up just answering your questions and reply, and that's all I can do. I can't think about anything else, because I forget everything."

Heerak's mind felt distant. He felt such extreme joy and delight that he was almost nauseated.

Doseon tilted his head. "I wonder why."

Heerak smiled elusively and repeated Doseon's words. "I wonder why."

Doseon's pupils cleared up. Heerak's voice and eyes—Doseon saw the other man return to normal and seemed relieved. The small smile on his lips was met with a series of several light kisses.

Heerak whispered in a low voice, "Hug me this time, Doseon."

The lips met and pulled apart lightly once again.

"Director—"

"Pull me in tightly."

Doseon could feel both of Heerak's thumbs stroke his cheeks, and Doseon slowly closed his eyes. They could feel each other's breaths get closer. They breathed warmth into each other's mouths.

Doseon's two hesitant arms very slowly wrapped around Heerak, and tightl pulled him in.

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IV

His lips were numb.

Doseon traced his lower lip with his finger. He could feel the shape of his swollen lips with his fingertips. It would likely take some time to regain sensation from his lips that had been bitten and sucked on until dawn.

Although his lips felt paralyzed, they didn't feel rough to the touch and now that he thought about it, he remembered Heerak diligently applying something on him. He was half passed out, but he clearly recalled Heerak snickering that he couldn't feel his lips.

Since last week, his working hours switched from night to day because Heerak wanted it switched. Even though it was easy switching from the day shift to the night shift, the opposite was very difficult, so Doseon didn't have high hopes when he wrote his request form. He had no idea that permission would be granted within one or two hours after he submitted his form. After taking some time to think about it, Doseon asked Heerak if he had a hand in this, to which Heerak only smiled.

Doseon had brought up the topic to him carefully. He barely managed to convey, in the most roundabout way possible, that the more the director did things like this, the more Doseon felt uncomfortable and ill at ease. He needed to muster up all his courage because he hated telling Heerak things the other man didn't want to hear, but he couldn't always let things like this pass.

When Doseon brought it up, Heerak immediately tried to persuade him. "Can't you give up and just get used to it? I think that'll be faster, since I'm already a lost cause. I'm the type who needs to do the things I need to do so I can feel better."

Doseon thought long and hard. How could he change Heerak's mind? He stared straight ahead, lost in thought. He could feel the depression ooze out of Heerak .

Heerak glanced at Doseon, checking his mood every so often, and looking dejected.

Doseon decided to stop thinking, as it wasn't leading him anywhere positive.

Doseon didn't want to see that kind of face on Heerak. He didn't feel too good seeing the always confident and high-spirited director with a slump to his shoulders because of Doseon. He thought that Heerak was the most handsome and brilliant when he was smiling, and looking upbeat suited Heerak's radiant face the best.

Each moment like this led Doseon to the same conclusion, something he was constantly reminded of with each moment they spent together.

The time he could be in a relationship with Heerak was limited. Even though he felt troubled by this generosity, thinking that this would end soon made his shoulders feel lighter. It seemed better for Doseon's mental well-being to let Heerak do as he wished for the time being. In any event, he didn't want to see Heerak's dispirited face, since he didn't have enough days left to even fill his memory with Heerak's smiling face.

He couldn't really call it a dispute, but they had another argument-like exchange outside of Doseon's work hours. It was because of Doseon's concern that he mentioned it in passing to Heerak's secretary, Seokchan. When he mentioned it to him, Seokchan looked serious, and seemed deep in thought. Apparently, Seokchan told Heerak about their discussion. Thanks to that, Doseon could readily mention the things that he couldn't say before because there hadn't been an opportunity.

Alphas and omegas.

Doseon, who lived in a world far away from those two categories, was amazed at the extent of influence that superdominant alpha pheromones had on other people. He had never imagined the day would come when he would get to experience this for himself, and it was similar to experiencing how it struck close to home when you heard about a murder happening next door, as opposed to the other side of the world. It was quite bewildering to have something he always considered someone else's reality to one day become his own.

"Do you feel uncomfortable when you're enveloped by my pheromones?" Heerak had asked.

Doseon's conclusion was to request that Heerak try to restrain himself, to which Heerak made a grave face, and replied coldly. Doseon's head hurt; were all alphas like this? Why did Heerak think to ask that question when Doseon had asked Heerak to restrain himself? Doseon didn't understand, and even if he tried to, he didn't think it was possible to comprehend.

In Doseon's logic, if strong superdominant pheromones made others uncomfortable, making an effort to stop emitting them was the answer. Doseon rambled, but he tried his best to convey his thoughts to the stone-faced Heerak, and Heerak didn't make it easy. The more troubled he was, Heerak's eyes grew colder and more distant. No matter how much he racked his brain, he couldn't think of any other way to say it. As a last resort, Doseon had no choice but to bring up the complaint that he really didn't want to use.

Doseon said he always felt anxious because he felt disturbed glances wherever he went at work—that when people jumped in surprise and backed away from him, his entire body froze and became tense, as if he had committed a crime.

He said it without expecting much of a response as he only wanted Heerak to know his current circumstances.

However, this was surprisingly effective. Heerak, who was close by listening quietly, extended his arms and wrapped them around Doseon as soon as he heard the word *crime*. Doseon's eyes widened at the apologies uttered in his ear, and Heerak whispered that he swore he had no intention at all to make Doseon feel that way. Heerak said he was rash and that he thought he was short-sighted, and he continued to mumble apologies into Doseon's ear while they hugged .

Doseon shook his head, still in Heerak's warm embrace. Listening to Heerak's voice gradually become more depressed as the apologies went on made Doseon feel like a lowlife.

According to Heerak, when he came inside Doseon, the pheromones lingered stronger and for a longer amount of time. So far, even when condoms were placed in plain sight, they weren't used most of the time. However, after Doseon said he felt like a guilty criminal, Heerak used a condom without fail. Plus, whenever Doseon was about to leave, Heerak diligently sprayed pheromone deodorant onto him.

It felt strange to see Heerak snatching the condoms on top of the nightstand while pressing his lips together. Even stranger, Doseon felt very unfamiliar each time he was sprayed with deodorant from head to toe, and wondered what he would get used to first. Perhaps the day he would get used to this would never come, and he would only be free of it until the day that his relationship with Heerak came to an end.

Rather than familiarity, he felt more comforted by unfamiliarity.

When Doseon was thrown back into his regular daily life, he easily knew what he would forget first.

Presently, the bounds between remoteness and intimacy were faint. It was like that whenever Heerak was involved. From the sex that happened every two or three days, to his touches, gaze, temperature, and voice—the things that were previously so distant soon blended into the ordinary. Doseon realized that he was becoming complacent in the ensuing days, and every time he realized that, he became scared.

Today, he ended up saying the executive director's name again.

Doseon always promised that *next time* he would call the executive director by his name and not by his title, and if anyone asked if he kept that promise, the answer was he couldn't. Heerak whined with his face all red that Doseon was a liar, but he couldn't bring himself to say Heerak's name out loud. Heerak looked pretty disappointed, but he ended up smiling and allowing it to happen, saying that it couldn't be helped.

Every instance of Heerak's disappointed look layered on top of each other, and this time, it was Doseon's turn to give in. As Heerak clasped their together hands like usual while inside Doseon, Doseon called out Heerak's name, while looking at the other man's face. Doseon's voice was very tiny, i t was a voice blurred and hoarse from his heated moans and tears.

Heerak looked extremely touched, and his eyes turned to crescents as he smiled in joy.

Doseon stared at that face, mesmerized. He almost forgot about the tingling sensation shooting up from his lower half, and he gazed endlessly, his whole body paralyzed by that smiling face.

It was lame, but a tear beaded up in the corner of his eye. He inwardly regretted that if only for that face, he should have

mentioned it earlier.

Doseon's eyes were wide open, but he couldn't lift a single finger for a long time, nor could he push away the arms wrapped around his back. He felt like he would wake Heerak up if he rushed to move when their bodies were pressed so tightly together, and he gently lifted his head.

Whoa, Doseon swallowed dryly.

Heerak's face was right before his eyes. Despite the dimness of the room, he could surprisingly make out all the features on face. From his neatly trimmed eyebrows, to his well-shaped lips, nothing was lacking in any aspect of his face.

Every now and then, there were times when talking with Heerak in which Doseon had to tell him that he had handsome features, or that he looked striking. For example, when Doseon was staring at Heerak and Heerak felt his stare, Heerak would ask, "I'm pretty good-looking, right?" There were also days when Heerak asked first, "How do I look today?"

Doseon answered honestly each time. He wasn't very smooth or adept at giving compliments, so he always gave short praises, such as telling Heerak he was good-looking or handsome, yet Heerak seemed satisfied with that and gave a pretty smile.

His gift of gab and flattery, established through his previous work experiences, was useless in front of Heerak. He couldn't think of a single decent flowery comment, and he always beat himself up over his lack of eloquence. His nervousness seemed to get worse by the day, As his body froze up completely, Doseon barely managed to give standard praises. Nevertheless, each time he called Heerak good-looking, Heerak shrugged his shoulders proudly and smiled contentedly.

Doseon would never get tired of watching it.

Doseon simply fluttered his eyelids as he sat still, gazing at Heerak's face. Heerak's always overwhelming good looks made Doseon's heart pound painfully against his chest. He thought that Seokchan, who saw Heerak daily and stuck close to him round the clock, was amazing. Doseon wasn't beside Heerak all the time, but he saw him almost daily now. Still, the fact that Doseon could observe Heerak at a close distance was something he just couldn't get used to.

Previously, it was just a fact of life that Doseon could only see this man through the media. When he started working at Hodie, Doseon thought he was extremely fortunate that he was permitted to see Heerak from afar once in a while, and he shook in delight when he did.

Now, they ate together, spent their free time with each other, and even had sex. Although these were all recent events, he didn't feel like this was his reality. In his head, he recalled the series of events that happened to him, but everything felt like an illusion. Maybe Doseon was actually asleep, and this was all just a very long dream.

Doseon's shoulders jolted when the silence in the room was disturbed by a loud beeping sound.

It was as if a sign had come to tell him that it was time to wake up from his dream.

The arms wrapped around his back flinched, as well. Doseon clicked his tongue to himself and grabbed his phone at the head of the bed. Despite turning the alarm off as quickly as possible, it wasn't enough to prevent Heerak from waking up.

"It's already time to send you off." That was the first thing Heerak grumbled as he sleepily opened his eyes. He grouchily mumbled that at the time Doseon needed to clock in was time for "sending Doseon off," and although he heard this all the time, Doseon felt his chest flutter.

"You're not going to tell me to change my shift again, are you?"

"Of course not."

Doseon sat up. Heerak squirmed a bit, and then followed suit.

"I'm going to use the bathroom, but you can sleep a bit longer, Director."

Heerak frowned as soon as he heard that.

"Director?"

Doseon quickly lowered his chin when he heard Heerak's sharp retort. He only wanted to escape the look of disappointment.

Their eyes met again.

As soon as Doseon lowered his face, the two hands wrapped around his cheeks to lift it back up. As if that wasn't enough, Heerak's eyes drew closer. When he was close enough that their noses could touch, Heerak whispered, "Tell me, who am I?"

After thinking, Doseon mumbled, “Can’t you overlook it? I just can’t bring myself to say it with a clear head.”

“So your head is clear all the time except for when you have sex. Why’re you so clear-headed? That’s no good. I’m always out of my mind, which is so damn unfair,” Heerak said without so much as a change in his expression.

Doseon found it increasingly difficult to reply to that. Doseon continued to squirm hesitantly, which made Heerak’s eyebrows wriggle.

He pressed on. “Try saying yourself, quickly.”

Doseon let out a short sigh. It was better to get it over with if he couldn’t avoid it.

“He-Heerak,” he ended up saying it begrudgingly, but Heerak smiled, satisfied.

“Good. You did well. I think you’ll improve if you keep calling me that.”

They went out of the room together, and although Doseon tried to persuade Heerak to sleep longer, Heerak didn’t budge and wanted to wash together. Since they entered the tub together so often, Doseon was already used to it.

Bathing together wasn’t the end. Heerak said he would drop Doseon off at Hodie, and today, as always, Doseon said he didn’t need to but was completely ignored.

Because he spent so much time in Heerak’s house, Doseon’s clothes and underwear filled up a portion of the dressing room. Not only that, there were a few garments that Heerak had pushed into his arms, saying that he bought them because he thought Doseon would look good in them. Doseon refused several times, saying that he couldn’t accept them and that it was overwhelming, but the returning answer was always the same. “I already bought it, so what can I do? It’s either you wear it, or I toss it.”

Doseon couldn’t think of a reasonable retort to that, so he decided to just accept the clothes for now; However, simply receiving it and hanging it up in the closet of Heerak’s apartment seemed to displease Heerak, and he said that this was no different from throwing it away, so he ended up dressing Doseon up in the clothes he bought after every bath.

After choosing the clothes and dressing Doseon, Heerak got ready. He spent his time staring blankly in front of his dressing room door. Heerak spent an inordinate amount of time picking out Doseon's clothes, but he poured in equally as much time when choosing his own outfit. Even Heerak knew that cheap, discounted t-shirts from an underground shopping center would be brought to life if he wore them, so Doseon had no idea why Heerak spent so much time putting outfit after outfit against himself all of the time. He even complained that he had nothing to wear, and Doseon didn't know what to say to that. What would that make the other garments on the hangers? Doseon remembered his shock when he first stood before the vast dressing room, and saw the suits and accessories lined up inside.

"How is it?" Heerak finally emerged.

The moment Heerak approached him and asked, Doseon automatically said, "You look handsome." It wasn't until after he said that, that he brought his eyes down to scan Heerak's outfit.

Doseon thought that black was the most representative color for men's suits, while navy or gray was the brightest that they got; however, looking at Heerak's getup, he found that wasn't the case. Just like Heerak's unconventional trajectory, the suit was a statement, and the vivid wine-colored suit on Heerak was picturesque.

His clean and fair skin, together with his bone structure, figure, and proportions—he lacked nothing, so others always marveled at him. The reason Heerak could pull off such an outfit and palette that other men were hesitant to wear with such ease, was that he was perfect from head to toe. This didn't stem from Doseon's bias, since anyone who knew Heerak would agree with this statement.

I wish Heerak would send a picture of his outfit today as well, Doseon thought wistfully.

When Heerak told Doseon to make a folder in his phone's gallery with his name on it, Doseon wondered why, but soon after, Heerak started to send photos that were never on social media at least once a day through text. The photos saved on the folder labeled "Director" snowballed in size.

Doseon wiggled the corners of his mouth. Although the undeniable truth that Heerak looked as handsome as always kept

popping up in his head, there was one thing that left much to be desired, and Doseon thought he needed to at least bring this up to Heerak.

"Director."

Normally, this was the point where Heerak would have badgered him, but this time, Heerak disregarded it, because, he seemed to have caught on to something strange, and narrowed his eyes.

"Yeah? What is it? Is it not that good?" Heerak asked in an urgent tone.

Doseon quickly shook his head. "It's not about that…"

It was a bit troubling to meet the curious eyes. Doseon shifted his eyes to avert Heerak's gaze and mumbled feebly, "Could I tell you about a wish that I have?"

"What is it? Please say it quickly."

Heerak looked like he couldn't endure not knowing, and though he felt sorry, Doseon couldn't bring himself to talk anymore. It was already too late to regret it, but he suddenly wondered if it was all right to request this in the first place. He said it was something he wanted, so he didn't think it would be good to drag this on for longer.

Doseon slowly whispered what came to his mind as soon as he saw Heerak. "I wish you wore a V-neck shirt instead of this dress shirt. Although it's something I desire, I think a lot of others want this, as well."

Heerak's eyes widened, and he tilted his head. "What? Does this shirt not look good on me?"

Doseon denied it immediately. "No, I don't think there's anything in this world that you won't look good in."

Heerak laughed brightly.

Every time Heerak's shoulders shook, his hair flowed with it as well. Doseon's eyes felt healed just watching this good-looking man laughing, so he made sure he watched it without missing a moment. His heart felt warm automatically, And while he knew they weren't good thoughts to have, one part of his heart started swelling up exultantly. Doseon, who used to be one of the countless social media followers on Heerak's pages, was able to surpass them all and watch Heerak's laughing face up close. He couldn't help but feel a bit smug.

Heerak drew nearer to him with large strides. He lightly pinched Doseon's cheek, and smiled with his eyes. "I say this every time.

Can’t you smile when you compliment me? I don’t think it’s something to say with that face, Although it still makes me feel good.”

“I’m also frustrated. I wonder when I’ll feel less nervous in front of you. Honestly, I sometimes think that maybe that day will never come.”

“I’m definitely going to see you smile brightly one of these days. Anyways, why a V-neck?”

“Because a dress shirt doesn’t show your chest.”

Heerak blinked as if he heard something unexpected, made a mischievous face, and whispered affably, “You didn’t see it enough last night?”

“I did see to my fill, but people around you didn’t.” Doseon thought it was good to share good views. It was dissatisfying to see the shirt buttoned up at Heerak’s chest. As Heerak said, not only was it his collar bone, Doseon saw his entire body several times a week. It just so happened that this was possible now between them. It was harder to find more flaws than charms, but Heerak’s collarbones made Doseon hold his breath several times; his elegant neckline blended into it with a fantastic synergy.

Hrmm.

Doseon glanced up at Heerak. The smile on the self-illuminating face grew a bit fainter, and Doseon felt anxious that he said something wrong. Just as that thought occurred to him, Heerak said, sounding displeased, “Something about this… makes me feel a bit weird.”

“Director?”

Heerak smiled vaguely. “I wish you were a bit more possessive. Why are you being considerate of the people surrounding me? I think I would have felt fantastic if you said that you just wanted to be the only one to see me, and know how handsome I am.”

“Is there anyone who doesn’t know that you’re handsome?” Doseon asked sincerely.

“Well, I guess not?” Heerak laughed first, and Doseon smiled as if influenced by Heerak.

The eyes on Doseon sparkled in delight as if to confirm that Doseon was correct—that was when Doseon realized, *‘Oh, I’m smiling.’* It was so easy to tell what Heerak liked, hence Doseon was

very keen to smile more often. It drove Doseon up the wall that his smile that appeared naturally in front of others, didn't show itself readily in front of Heerak.

Doseon sighed inwardly and spoke again. "I don't want to be that demanding. I think becoming selfish always brings negative consequences."

Heerak scoffed. "Do you know what you're saying? How much is being selfish? Think of it this way—there is an abundance of people in Korea who want to win the lottery. Do you think all those people suffered misfortunes?"

That sounded rational. Doseon too was one of those countless people who wished to win the grand prize, and whether he bought a ticket that day or not, he never hesitated before wishing, quite laughably, that he wanted to win the jackpot.

"No, I guess not."

"Right? People need to be a bit selfish sometimes." Heerak looked triumphant, shrugging his shoulders.

They left Heerak's apartment together.

Even though he complained, Heerak couldn't seem to ignore Doseon's comment, because he quickly changed into a V-neck T-shirt. He sneaked peeks at Heerak's prominent chest, and smiled to himself.

***

Doseon resigned from the company he had worked at for three years.

There were a lot of reasons why a person might quit their jobs. In Doseon's case, he left half spontaneously, and the other half was because he thought that if he didn't quit now, he would never be able to quit at all.

His colleagues from the sales department constantly lamented that drinking was going to kill them one day, while some almost died because of it. For Doseon, alcohol wasn't his issue. He drank almost daily back then, so for quite some time after quitting his job, Doseon grew accustomed to abstaining from alcohol, but his drinking habits from his job did not really debilitate him.

Colleagues, superiors, and the clients he met at work; he didn't get very stressed out by them. He wasn't very prickly and was rather pretty indifferent, so he was never negatively affected by social interactions. However, after using up his quota of smiles during the workday, he didn't even have the energy to smile when he got home, which made him feel a bit empty inside, however, he didn't want to whine childishly about this way of life. Everyone lived like this. If he had time to lament, it was better to spend that time on sleep.

One day, he started to hate being comforted by thinking that *everyone lived like this*. He was certain that he would continue to live his life subordinate to the corporation, regardless of the day of the week, and while some might want to maintain a stable lifestyle, Doseon was not one of them.

The moment he felt that his endless routine was stifling, he couldn't take it anymore. Maybe it was a mistake to realize that he felt suffocated in the first place, and the thought that he couldn't live on like this weighed down on his entire being.

Both his parents thought he was crazy for quitting his job.

They said that he was being entitled and yelled at him, asking what he was thinking of doing from now on. His parents, who had watched their son from the sidelines so far, grabbed him, whacked his back angrily, and fumed at Doseon for the first time in his life. Doseon couldn't explain anything to his parents.

Maybe it was because he could have some breathing space after breaking out of the confines of his life, but now that he thought about it, he couldn't understand why he submitted his resignation letter. Being unemployed and worrying about the future should have been the bleaker prospect, but for some strange reason, the fear that he could live like a corporate drone forever was overpowering. Doseon was sure he would have done the same thing if he went back to the day he resigned, and he was plenty satisfied to live a life where he didn't need to constantly be alert to the group chat over the weekends.

The problem was his life was still tied to credit card debt, rent, and various other bills. Rather than eating away at his severance pay, he thought it would be better to have at least some regular job. Put simply, he thought he was silly for searching for a new job only a month after he ran out of his old job because he didn't want to work.

Of course, he didn't intend to idle away in his home in the first place, anyways. Money was an issue, but he felt like having a job would force him to breathe the outside air.

As he scrolled through a job posting site, Hodie's job recruitment post caught Doseon's eyes. The monthly salary was suspiciously high, and the benefits were better than some companies, which made Doseon doubt his eyes again. He couldn't find anything about preferred experience levels.

With these conditions, Doseon was almost certain that they already hired someone new. He contacted them, uncertain, and to his delight they asked for an interview immediately. It all happened in a flash after that. As soon as Manager Moon, the person in charge of Hodie saw Doseon's resume, he asked when Doseon could start.

He later heard from his colleagues why he was hired so quickly. The fact that he was a beta most likely played a big part in his hire. When employers posted classified advertisements, writing that they preferred betas in their preferences would earn them a fine under anti-discrimination laws, so it was common practice to interview or contact their candidates, and later send an email rejecting them and wishing them the best of luck.

Doseon was familiar with the fact that service jobs, where they received guests all the time, preferred betas. Hundreds of pheromone-related incidents happened every day, so being a beta, who was relatively free from the effects of pheromones, was seen as a plus.

In the world where alphas and omegas were the majority, Doseon didn't have an opinion about living as a beta. He felt a bit excluded at times, but that was all. Rather, as a third-party, he simply thought that it must be tiring to be constantly concerned about marking and pheromones, and everything that came with it.

When he got hired at Hodie, for the first time in his life, he thought, *It's wild to think that I'm receiving the perks for being a beta at this age.*

Because of this, he recently began to believe that being a beta was both a relief and very fortunate.

On the day that he had sex with Heerak for the second time, he realized that neither was the case.

Doseon was searching for a lot of advice on the internet. A completely unlikely incident happened in his life, and he kept being hit with inexplicable anxiety hour after hour. He needed more information to shake off some of those feelings.

After countless posts, the most frequent word was curiosity. It was the most common reason why an alpha would sleep with a beta. On one hand, some people felt uneasy about the new and exotic, while others reasoned that the act could be enjoyed as a simple detour from the normal, which Doseon could relate to.

He didn't think there would be a next time.

However, unlike his prediction, the sex between them continued.

The frequency even increased. It wasn't an overstatement to say that, recently, they saw each other daily. There was bound to be a time when Heerak's curiosity was fulfilled. Now that they were face-to-face with each other on the bed more times than he could count on his fingers, Doseon thought that it was about time that the executive director's curiosity was satiated.

But why was their relationship carrying on?

He compared the bothersome and annoying preparation before they fucked against the convenience of not worrying too much about pregnancy and condoms. He wasn't really sure which was right, but whenever he thought about it, he thought that perhaps the latter was still heavier on the scale of reason. If that wasn't the case, there was nothing else that could explain this.

It wasn't long after Doseon started working at Hodie that he saw the executive director. As he watched the face that his colleagues raved about on end from afar, Doseon thought Heerak truly lived up to the expectations. Heerak was someone worthy of being praised, in all sorts of ways.

It was quite easy for Doseon to engage with Heerak's life, as Heerak was a social media celebrity. The internet was filled with photos and information on him, and he even appeared on TV shows, as well. As a result, Doseon gained a hobby; He could understand now what his older sister meant when she said that k-pop idols were what kept her life going.

Like all of Heerak's fans, Doseon was enjoying himself at just the right level to gain the energy to keep on observing him from afar.

Even when Heerak brought gorgeous and beautiful omegas with him, Doseon didn't pay much mind. As his colleagues speculated whether Heerak's companion was his lover or his friend, he recalled sometimes thinking, *Those people usually use their appearances to their advantage, but I guess they really can't outshine our executive director*. Doseon didn't like that he was rating other people's looks in his head, so he made a conscious effort not to have those kinds of thoughts.

Then he saw Heerak, asleep on the bench.

As soon as he realized it was him, he smiled joyfully, like he found buried treasure. He felt like it had been a long time since he last smiled without want, and without being self-conscious. It was a bit old-fashioned of him, but at that moment, he wanted to yell, "Eureka!"

Doseon watched as Heerak's head nodded forward, jerked back up in surprise, and then let his head loll slowly to the side.

Whenever Heerak visited Hodie, he always looked flawless, and that applied to all of his photos and video clips as well, so i t was the first time Doseon saw him so defenseless. Most people probably never got to see this view. When Doseon thought that, he felt even more delighted.

In front of Heerak, he was always torn between two feelings: one was an unshakable nervousness with an intensity that he never felt before in his life. The other was the joy similar to what he felt when he discovered the sleeping Heerak. These two very strong feelings always collided in Doseon's was why his facial muscles, let alone his fingers, didn't move well l. This happened all the time in front of Heerak. Doseon replied to questions and answered when he was called; when Heerak approached him, Doseon met his eyes, and when he kissed him, Doseon would close his eyes, unsure of what to do.

Heerak said he felt insane, and he even said that it was unfair that he felt like he was the only one experiencing this. Although he could rebut it, Doseon himself couldn't even fathom whether he was in his right mind or not, and it didn't take long before his mind grew completely blank. Whenever Heerak stood before him, his brain froze completely.

Doseon thought this was good as it was.

Occasionally, something sharp and throbbing clawed at his heart, but Doseon decided to completely ignore it. While it wasn't good to have his head in the clouds, it was scary to swat the clouds away and face reality.

For example, thoughts like wondering what Heerak liked about Doseon. There must have been something that Heerak was intrigued about, since he kept wanting to meet with Doseon. Doseon wondered what that was, but he knew that having these thoughts in the present time was completely meaningless. He didn't want to mull over something that gripped him in fear. Just because the thought occurred to him, did not mean that the moment would end, but he also didn't want to face the situation directly and make a judgment about it.

He couldn't possibly know how I feel. So, at least for now, I don't want to think about what I think of him as well.

These days, whenever he met Heerak, Doseon told himself over and over, as if he was brainwashing himself, that this was fine as it was now—that he would never be this lucky ever again. It was ridiculous to worry when he was almost unworthy of deserving these moments.

Heerak said people need to be selfish. Heeding that, Doseon decided to be a bit needy, as well. Recently, his indistinct desire started taking form as a sharp image in his head.

Even though he was anxious, he wished these blissful days would continue for a bit longer.

* * *

"Director."

"Not again!"

Doseon made a mistake. Just a few hours ago, he made a resolution to skip the title and just get straight to the point, but he didn't get why he couldn't remember this one thing. His already stiff face became even more rigid after he heard Heerak's pouty voice.

"Well, you see…"

"My name!"

Heerak wasn't going to let Doseon off easily today; Heerak refused to give in. After hearing Heerak's firm tone, Doseon could

see that there was no room for escape.

Doseon let out a string of sighs inwardly, and reluctantly said, “Heerak, so… what was it again? Oh! Right. I was wondering if you could listen to my request.”

“Don’t be that formal!”

Doseon was speechless. He didn’t recover from the blow of calling Heerak by his given name yet, but to tell him to be less formal with his speech was too high of a hurdle.

“Okay, I’ll let you off this time. What did you want to ask?” Heerak asked.

Request or not, Doseon was leaning toward completely shutting up now. Heerak, who seemed to notice, quickly pressed him on. Doseon was amazed at the man who wouldn’t let him back out.

“Can’t you sit across from me?”

Heerak opened his eyes wide and grumbled, “What kind of request is that? Why? You don’t like sitting close to me?”

“No, I didn’t mean that.” Doseon looked to the side. With the table at the center, there were seats to the left and right. Even so, Heerak sat flush against him, had wrapped his arms around Doseon’s shoulders, and didn’t let him go. The ever-present sensation of Heerak’s arms was an issue, but there was another bigger issue. Doseon reluctantly said, “I just wanted to see your face.”

“Oh. I don’t know whether I should be happy or sad,” Heerak’s eyes were wide as he mumbled, “Now that you mention it, do you only like my face?”

Doseon thought for a moment and slowly replied, “At first, yes, I did. But after that, I came to like your voice, hands, feet, and I even ended up liking how tall you were. I started to like individual parts of you, as well. I like your eyes. I also like your nose and your lips. Same with your voice. I like that you sound husky sometimes, and when there’s laughter in your voice…”

The praise that poured out endlessly was interrupted by Heerak. “Stop, stop!”

Even with the dimly illuminating lights of the city at night, he could see that Heerak’s face was so red that it looked like it was about to explode. When Doseon glanced at the side of Heerak’s face, he heard Heerak say in an embarrassed voice, “I get it. Save the rest

for next time, okay? I'll listen to them one by one later. I feel a little tipsy right now."

Heerak fanned his face with his hands, and exhaled several times. Doseon imagined that Heerak would have been accustomed to these kinds of compliments by now, but when he saw Heerak being bashful, Doseon felt a bit sheepish.

The two of them were at the garden on the rooftop terrace. They were spending the evening drinking beer and eating a fried chicken that they picked up on the way home.

Watching the night skyline from the top of the high-rise apartment was dizzyingly beautiful, but the thought was fleeting; Beside Doseon was a being even more blinding than the landscape.

Doseon always felt a petrifying nervousness because of Heerak, and when Heerak lightly stroked his shoulders, he felt his head ring chaotically. Doseon had no idea whether he was properly understanding what he heard, or if he was responding appropriately at all.

"Right, didn't you say you had something to say to me?"

"Oh… Yes, I did."

He did.

Doseon had something he wanted to say today, for sure.

To be honest, this was something that had been on the tip of his tongue for a few days. The reason he kept it in until now was that he didn't know whether it was his place to tell this to Heerak, and he was worried that Heerak would get upset. There were one or two times where Doseon thought he really needed to tell Heerak, but it wasn't easy to find the right time to tell him. When Heerak approached him with a broad smile, the inside of Doseon's head blacked out, and the only thoughts that were in his head were that he must respond to everything Heerak said.

Doseon felt that at this rate, he wouldn't be able to say anything for months. He didn't know how much longer he would be able to see Heerak up close, but he didn't want to think that far into the future yet. In any case, it was better to tell him sooner rather than later, so on their way home, he announced that he had something to say to Heerak.

"Director, I…"

“Again!” Heerak narrowed his eyes and intercepted. “I won’t listen. I don’t want to.”

Heerak turned away, pretending to be distracted by something else.

Doseon took some deep breaths to himself. He could call others by their names effortlessly, yet Doseon needed to repeat countless resolutions to himself to be able to call Heerak’s name. It wasn’t because Doseon felt uncomfortable as Heerak’s subordinate, and it wasn’t because Doseon was used to calling him by the title of executive director. It was because simply uttering his name was one of the most nerve-racking acts.

“Heerak,” Doseon said in a totally muffled voice. After hearing his name muttered as quickly as possible,

Heerak burst out laughing and murmured in a low voice, “I feel like I became a doormat,”

Doseon tilted his head. “A doormat?”

“Yeah, a doormat. I stubbornly pushed you to call my name once, but I end up smiling happily like a fool. I’m so lame.”

Despite the complaint, his face was full of smiles. Doseon stared, mesmerized by the soft laughter in Heerak’s eyes, and the smile on his face.

“What did you want to tell me?” Heerak drew closer as if to show that he was ready to listen, which made Doseon’s shoulders stiffen. The splendid smile on Heerak’s lips temporarily turned Doseon’s mind blank.

His lips wouldn’t open. Doseon was going to say it today, but he just found it difficult to start talking. He wasn’t certain, but he had a feeling that Heerak wasn’t going to like this. He wished that Heerak would continue smiling like this, and he would feel very depressed if that smile faded away because of what he was about to say.

Doseon reluctantly began to speak. “These days you always wait for me until I get off work.”

“What about it?”

“I think it would be better if I came straight here, or if we met someplace else instead of having you wait at Hodie.”

“But why?”

Seeing Heerak narrow his eyes because he didn’t get Doseon’s point made Doseon’s grow quieter.

Doseon cleared his throat a few times. “People keep misunderstanding our relationship. They keep thinking that the director and I are being strange. Right now, I’m somehow evading the topic, but who’s to tell how far the rumors will spread?”

Oh, right, I called him the director again.

Doseon winced and peeked at Heerak from the corner of his eyes. Thankfully, Heerak didn’t seem to notice, but instead seemed to be deep in thought.

Doseon felt quite embarrassed that he brought this topic up himself. It was at times like these that he thought it was a good thing that he was always nervous in front of Heerak. He could overcome this situation without Heerak ever catching on that Doseon felt uncomfortable.

Heerak, who was quiet for a while, suddenly said, “Doseon Yoon, would you be bothered if rumors spread about us?”

His tone and voice were stern. Doseon slowly averted his gaze and replied in a trembling voice, “No, you would be the one in a more troubling situation.”

Heerak narrowed his eyes, questioning what that meant. “I won’t be troubled at all.”

Doseon couldn’t understand how nonchalant Heerak was about it. No matter how he thought about it, there were many things that Heerak should be concerned about—the public at large, and his family as well. Heerak would probably not welcome an ad hominem rumor about Heerak spread with Doseon as his counterpart. Of course, this kind of gossip likely didn’t tarnish his reputation, but Heerak was bound to get questioned about it from his surroundings for a while.

Doseon was confident that this would continue until Heerak ended their relationship.

It would be better if Heerak distanced himself from Doseon. However, if he had no mind to do that, then the least he could do was to pretend that they weren’t in a relationship in front of others.

“What are you so worried about?”

“A lot of things.”

“If I try to think of something, I can come up with at least one thing. People around you who bothered you with questions, do they still do that?”

“They have a few times, but I told them that it was their misunderstanding, and afterward, none of them asked about you.”

Heerak smirked and scoffed. “Misunderstanding? Like they’d believe that. I wouldn’t believe that if I were them either. Starting from when I first started to follow you around, your body has probably smelled strongly of superdominant alpha pheromones, despite the fact that I’ve been restraining myself these days.

Doseon sighed quietly and mumbled, “That’s why we should be careful about our meeting places, and where we go—”

Heerak cut off Doseon’s slow rambling. “That’s my point! Why do you want to do that? It’s meaningless. Since rumors are circulating already, isn’t it better to just meet freely?”

“What if word spreads to an extent beyond your control, and f or example, what if your family hears about me?”

“Hmmm… you’re right, I didn’t really think that far.”

Embarrassment flooded Doseon’s face at Heerak’s reply. Evidently, Doseon thought too far ahead. He had mentioned it because he was just concerned for Heerak, but he wondered how Heerak understood it.

After taking a moment to think about it, Heerak stated succinctly, “I don’t really care if they learned about it.”

“Sorry?”

“Why? Are you uncomfortable with it?”

“No, I’m fine with it too.”

At the quick response, Heerak smiled, satisfied. “Then, that’s that.”

They quickly moved on from the topic. In the end, nothing about their routine had changed, and Heerak would probably come to Hodie the next day to pick Doseon up, and then Doseon would probably follow Heerak to have dinner with him before going over to Heerak’s apartment.

“I laughed a lot earlier.” Heerak snickered and tightened his grasp.

As a result, Doseon flinched as he was pulled flush to Heerak, but he didn’t forget to respond.

“Did something good happen?”

“Rather than good, something funny happened while I was talking with Seokchan. I told him my concern that you were having a

hard time calling me by my name. It was you, Doseon, who made me grab Mr. Secretary to whine and make him give me advice."

Heerak emphasized "Doseon" strongly, which made Doseon wince.

"On top of that, I said that I thought I was also still too formal with you. But do you know what Seokchan said to me? He said this would be solved if we call each other by pet names."

"Pet names?"

"So I asked what kind of names we should use, and Seokchan, with an indifferent face just like yours, said slyly, "Aren't there a lot? Honey, darling, baby, et cetera. It's up to you what you use." Whenever I remembered that throughout the day, I had a tough time keeping myself from bursting out laughing."

Heerak brought his index finger to his nose and pushed up his nonexistent glasses while intimidating Seokchan's voice. Doseon could easily picture Seokchan's face as he fixed his glasses, and a smile softened Doseon's rigid lips. Seeing Doseon's faint smile made Heerak feel like he achieved a big feat.

"I think that's too greasy."

"I thought so too. I told Seokchan to his face as soon as I heard that, and that I would cringe to death… but then…" Heerak looked at Doseon with mischief in his eyes. "Since you keep calling me *Director* instead of my name, I thought that maybe it would be better to call each other by these pet names. Do you want to start now? Honey, babe, darling. Which one do you like?"

Doseon shook his head a few times, appalled. "I'm not sure I can do it. No, I can't!"

"It's better than calling me *Director*."

"Then I would much rather just call you by name."

"Then say it, my name." Heerak's eyes gleamed in anticipation. Doseon felt like he fell in Heerak's trap, and promptly called him "Heerak" to appease him. This was the most natural he had sounded so far. Perhaps Heerak felt the same way because his smile was practically glowing, and his eyes were folded into crescents.

"I never thought I'd feel this good, even though I was the one who bugged you for it."

Heerak smiled radiantly and pulled Doseon into a hug.

Doseon only blinked, chin on Heerak's shoulder, in Heerak's embrace. The other man smelled good. It was probably the fragrance of his body lotion or shampoo.

Whenever Doseon caught a good scent from the Heerak , he wondered what Heerak's pheromones smelled like. Doseon was just a bit envious of other people who could smell Heerak. Doseon had never disliked or felt inconvenienced with his life as a beta so far, but recently, because of Heerak, he felt the difference between them and thought that it was a shame.

It's probably a very beautiful scent, just like Heerak.

No matter what he did or how hard he tried, this privilege would probably never be granted to Doseon. On one hand, he felt relieved by that, but Moments like these were when he felt regrettable about his situation, he had to brace himself for the end of his time with Heerak.

There wasn't enough time to wallow in self-pity, so he just should enjoy himself to the fullest.

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On nights that they didn't have sex, they chatted until they fell asleep.

The last time he talked about all the little details of insignificant and personal things was when he was still in his school days. It was possible back then because he saw his friends every day. Now each of them was so busy working and living their lives that when they met up, they primarily talked about the heavy things. They had a group chat, but they never chatted about the small things, like what they ate for breakfast or what they did during their free time.

Heerak was quite inquisitive.

He asked why Doseon quit his previous job, and what he ate for lunch that day. Doseon answered diligently to the questions which varied between serious and light topics. Heerak always listened with interest, and he didn't carelessly let things go. He always showed Doseon that he was listening, or asked follow-up questions. He made sure that Doseon didn't feel like he was just chattering away on his own. This side of Heerak reminded Doseon of back when he interacted with clients, making him smile to himself.

Beyond asking questions, Heerak also talked about his daily life.

Even though he smiled while he talked about it, it wasn't the kind of life that Doseon would consider enjoyable. Heerak even went as far as to say that his sole respite was when he drank with his close friends. In addition to his regular work, lunch, dinner, even going golfing were extensions of work, and shopping with his sister seemed to be a part of his job, as well. On weekdays, he fulfilled his business duties, and the weekends were for social responsibilities. He moved along day by day, following the schedule arranged by his secretary, along with his routine obligations and responsibilities. Moreover, Heerak felt a strong sense of duty with each task, and they were duties he felt that he needed to fulfill. Every time Doseon heard about it, he thought that it was good that Heerak at least liked his job.

"It sounds all very intense, and it seems like the only time you can take a breather is when you sleep," Doseon mumbled worriedly.

Yet Heerak denied it, saying that was preposterous. "No way. Nowadays, I'm finding peace in my heart from meeting you every day, and I can't ask for any more than that."

Heerak's reply was extremely unexpected. It had never even crossed Doseon's mind, he felt very grateful. Every day Doseon also cleansed his eyes and created many pleasant memories when he looked at Heerak. Knowing that Heerak felt at least some peace of mind while spending his time with Doseon was an extremely good thing.

Doseon thanked him out loud. Heerak jolted upright when he heard that, and Doseon sat up, looking perplexed. The lamp cast a dim light, so it wasn't very apparent, but it probably wasn't Doseon's imagination that Heerak's pretty face looked very bewildered.

"But that doesn't mean I'm treating you carelessly!"

Doseon wondered what in the world Heerak meant by that.

Although he wanted to respond, he couldn't understand what this was suddenly about. Doseon desperately racked his brain for a response.

Silence hung in the air.

In that still air, Heerak looked even more flustered, and started talking in a disorganized fashion. "Well, I mean! When I meet you, my fatigue is relieved, and the irritation I received that day dissipates… anyway, I feel better when I see you, but that's not the

only reason that I meet you. I don't want you to think that I'm just using you as a stress reliever… ah, damn it!"

Heerak, who was prattling on, grabbed his head in his hands, and sighed. Doseon could only watch absentmindedly. Just moments ago, he was thinking hard to come up with a reply, and now, he couldn't think at all. Heerak was sitting in front of him and expressing his bewilderment with his tone and pitch at every moment, so Doseon couldn't just sit there.

When he saw this side, Doseon was very happy. Of course, Doseon liked when Heerak looked self-assured, as if he knew that he really was all that. However, when Heerak was completely flustered and obviously didn't know what to do with himself, Doseon was even more delighted. Heerak was very, very cute. These aspects of him were things that Doseon would never be able to see on TV or social media, so he felt like he needed to observe as much as possible when he could.

"Are you going to stay quiet while I run around all flustered like an utter fool?"

Thanks to Heerak, Doseon snapped out of it. He didn't know when, but Heerak's face shifted from being flustered to shooting sulky looks in Doseon's direction. Even then, Doseon didn't quite understand why Heerak was so taken aback and said all the things he did.

"You're cute." Ultimately, Doseon honestly told the him what he was feeling. Perhaps it wasn't quite fitting to call the executive director cute, but he couldn't come up with anything else other than that.

Heerak was still for a moment, then asked fussily, "How cute?"

"Very, very cute." Doseon answered sincerely.

Heerak made a sullen smile and leaned toward Doseon.

Their faces grew close.

"Are you just saying that?"

At this moment, Doseon's nervousness was just a little bit alleviated. The corners of his mouth loosened as he watched the other's gleaming and expectant eyes.

As Doseon smiled faintly, Heerak looked triumphant. Heerak was practically begging with his body language, and Doseon raised his hand in wordless surrender. The destination was Heerak's light hair.

Heerak was always very delighted when Doseon petted his hair, and he even joked that it opened his eyes to a new preference. Not only did he like it when they were having sex, but now it was ordinary for Heerak to ask Doseon to pet him often, and for him to just stick his head out at Doseon for no reason at all.

Doseon also liked it, because every time he touched the other's soft and flowing hair, he felt a fluttering feeling in his heart that surpassed his nervousness. At first, Doseon felt very awkward and even cowered a bit, but because Heerak was so open about liking it a lot, before he knew it, Doseon was able to pet he other man's hair more naturally than in the past.

Doseon stroked his hair as tenderly as he could. In the beginning, he simply patted Heerak's head, but lately, Doseon was slightly braver, and would run his hair between his fingers, or gently massage the other's scalp.

He hadn't heard Heerak tell him to stop. Instead, Heerak extended his arms and hugged him. He crushed Doseon in his arms and swayed his torso side to side, then buried his forehead into Doseon's shoulder and sighed. This was where Heerak's routine conditioning bore fruit, and Doseon, who usually became stiff from the sudden hug, hurriedly pulled Heerak's back and shoulders into his arms. Heerak's lips found their way to Doseon's neck, and he chuckled with pleasure. Doseon was able to let out a sigh of relief, and a lthough it was still difficult for him to call Heerak by his given name, giving into this was something that he could do quite smoothly now. The effectiveness of learning by repetition was something he felt skin-deep.

They went through the pattern tonight as they did every night.

Talking, patting Heerak's head, and hugging each other tightly, then falling asleep—it was that kind of a night.

Doseon slowly opened his eyes. He contemplated lifting his head up to check Heerak's sleeping face, but he quickly gave up and closed his eyes again. The lamplight was gone, having been turned off. The room was blanketed in darkness and instead of being frustrated that he was unable to see Heerak's face properly in the dark, it was better to simply enjoy his body warmth.

Normally, Doseon was the type of person who could fall asleep easily. No matter how fast his heart raced or how difficult it was to

smile even once due to his nerves, as soon as his head hit the pillow, he fell asleep. However, that wasn't easy to do these days. He couldn't fall asleep as easily.

Perhaps he felt that sleeping was a waste of time now. Wouldn't this count as an illness at this point? He knew that if he slept, he would be able to see Heerak with a clear head and refreshed eyes.

He simply thought that this too shall end, and so he wanted to enjoy this situation so that he wouldn't regret it, no matter what happened. Of course, that thought remained undiminished, but in these few days, his excessive anxiety seemed to have increased.

He foolishly thought that he would know when, and how, the relationship would end.

It seemed like Heerak didn't think much at all about how and when this relationship would end, however. It would be quite shameless of Doseon to ask the other for how long they would be like this, and for the exact date their relationship would end.

More concerns were the last things Doseon needed right now, in this miraculous, everyday life. He wished that his head would grow white like snow. He wanted to go back to the beginning when he didn't over-think and he could just gaze at the face before his eyes.

Doseon disliked how his useless worries kept stacking on top of each other, one after another, in his mind. He was sure that this was why he couldn't fall asleep easily.

Doseon squeezed his eyelids shut;

He wanted to fall asleep quickly.

After all, this was the best way to run away from his thoughts.

* * *

For once, Doseon went back to his own home after work.

Now that he thought about it, this was the first time that he went home, and not to Heerak's, after changing his shift to the daytime. The inside of his home was still fairly bright thanks to the sun staying out longer. He didn't usually eat at home, so he wasn't worried about having food waste, but neglecting his pile of laundry and cleaning duties any further would be very bad.

After vacuuming and putting his laundry in the washing machine, Doseon ended up grinning to himself. He just recalled that thirty

minutes before he got off work, Manager Moon and his colleagues all began glancing at Doseon with similar expressions on their faces.

Doseon always had an amicable smile, and was nice to everyone at work. When someone like that suddenly looked intimidating when asked about his relationship to Heerak, and repeated, “We’re not like that,” or “It’s all a misunderstanding,” nobody questioned him any further.

Heerak usually waited in the parking lot or the front of the building for him. Heerak, who only used to come once in a while with his friends, was visiting very frequently, yet none of the employees said anything. It was an open secret amongst the staff that his only objective was to pick Doseon, but they never mentioned it in front of him. Of course, Doseon knew about his colleagues’ accommodation, but today, Heerak didn’t come.

It was pretty awful. Every time Doseon felt the curious and worried glances, he could only smile back awkwardly.

Doseon himself didn’t really think much about it. Rather, he felt that it was strange that they met every day, and he wondered whether passionate couples met this frequently to begin with.

Heerak’s job included having lunch with clients. Of course, he also had dinners where drinking naturally ensued, and when Doseon worked in the sales department, most of his wine and dines were at dinnertime.

Of course, it didn’t really matter, even if it wasn’t related to work.

Doseon could understand how, in other people’s view, Heerak’s visits were routine, and it must have seemed weird that he didn’t drop by today. However, Doseon thought that he would be too self-assured to think that Heerak would want to meet Doseon every day, and that was why he wasn’t surprised that Heerak didn’t come.

Doseon would never be more surprised in his life than the moment Heerak grabbed his wrist and asked to have sex with him. Perhaps it was because he got his lifetime’s worth of shock, but Doseon felt like most everything would not surprise him anymore.

It would be nice if his nervousness disappeared like his surprise. Unfortunately, it felt like it increased as time went on, and he spent all afternoon thinking about it.

The view outside his window was darker by the time he was almost done with his chores, so he thought it was a good time to turn

on the lights inside.

He just turned on the living room and kitchen light when the doorbell rang throughout his apartment. Doseon thought for a second that it had been a while since he heard his doorbell. It felt like everything timed itself to happen that day.

The doorbell rang continuously like it was warning Doseon not to get distracted, and this time, Doseon hurriedly shuffled to the front door. He had no idea who would press the bell so doggedly, and he didn't think it was the milk delivery or a religious recruiter at this time of day. He was a little annoyed because he didn't know who it was, and ringing the bell this much was a nuisance.

"Who is it?" Doseon asked, in a slightly annoyed voice.

There was a brief silence. He wondered if the other person on the other side of the door left at the tone of his voice. When he approached the door to see what happened, he heard a very sharp voice.

"Who else would it be?"

Doseon's eyes widened. His hands quickly fumbled with the front door locks, but the man on the other side, who was too impatient to wait for Doseon to open the door, turned the handle and pushed the door open.

It was the man who he thought it might be.

The moment Doseon lifted his head and looked up, he backed away a few steps. It was the first time he saw such an annoyed face on Heerak. Even when they were arguing over the 40,000 won when they first met, Heerak didn't make a face like this. The impact given by a frigid, handsome man was powerful, and i f could charm people with a smile, then his face could kill a person with his sneer.

Did I do something wrong? Doseon's head spun. *Is he like this because of me? What was it? Was it because I opened the door too late?*

In that short moment, hundreds of thoughts poured into Doseon's head, a nd yet, in this moment, Doseon thought that the hair stuck on Heerak's sweaty face and rosy lips were very provocative, and he really wanted to take out his phone and ask if he could take a few pictures. This side of Heerak was very rare and precious. To see a disheveled director—he couldn't believe it.

Heerak tried to calm down, but he recalled what made him upset, and raising his voice, yelled. “What the hell is wrong with this building?!”

He was clearly very agitated.

Doseon tilted his head and wondered if he heard correctly.

“Sorry?”

“I was in such a hurry, but my patience felt like it was being tested!”

“Was there a problem?”

“There was a big problem! What’s with the parking lot here? It’s so damn frustrating! What’s the point of having one? It was so freaking full of cars! Where do they expect visitors to park? Are they kidding me? If a car is parked in the back corner, can it only come out later? If they wanted to get out, they’d have to call all the owners of the cars parked in front of it! Isn’t that nuts!?” Heerak yelled, huffing, and his voice echoed down the hall.

Doseon didn’t want to interrupt, so he leaned forward and reached for the door handle, shutting the door tightly. Heerak paid no mind to what Doseon was doing and vented his complaints without taking a single breath in between words.

Doseon twisted his body to the side to shut the door, then went back to his standing position. As he stared at Heerak, Doseon realized that he didn’t say anything back to him.

He quickly said, “It would’ve been better to wait by the side of the road and call me.”

Heerak scoffed. “In that narrow alley? What if a car drove by at that moment and caused an accident? I’m sure I would let the driver off with no problem and settle it, but the other party’s head would be spinning with numbers before I could even speak.”

“That’s true.” Doseon agreed, nodding. Then, in a puzzled voice, Doseon quietly added, “Well, you didn’t have to come up here in the first place. You could have called me to come down to help you, I think…”

“Oh.” Heerak let out a sigh and pressed his lips together. “You’re right. Why didn’t I think of that?” When Heerak spoke again, he looked shaken up. He didn’t seem to understand himself and let out a couple of long sighs.

Doseon, who was simply watching him, thought he should say something and slowly added, “So what did you do with your car?”

Heerak looked a bit distracted and answered the question robotically. “I just parked at the closest paid lot that I could find on my GPS.”

“The closest lot is still a way off from here. Wasn’t it still a five-minute walk?”

Heerak looked blank and shook his head. “I don’t know, I just ran here without even thinking about it.”

Doseon scanned the man up and down with his eyes. No wonder he was so wet. No matter how hot it was, Doseon always thought Heerak became unnaturally soaked. He didn’t look like someone who just got out of his air-conditioned car.

“In this heat, in that suit, and in those shoes?” Doseon felt sorry for Heerak, but he couldn’t help sounding stunned.

Heerak smiled weakly. “What about it? Can’t someone dressed like me run when it’s hot out?”

“Well, no, I guess you could.” Doseon was quick to deny and stared long and hard at Heerak’s face, glistening with perspiration. The deep V of Heerak’s shirt let Doseon clearly see beads of sweat rolling down Heerak’s neck.

A long silence followed. Heerak looked vacant, and Doseon was no different. A few minutes passed with the two just staring at each other's faces.

Doseon couldn’t help it, but he burst out laughing. Heerak’s eyes widened, and he looked as if he had just witnessed an alien landing, but that only fueled Doseon’s burst of laughter. Doseon knew it was impolite, but he couldn’t stop laughing, no matter how hard he tried.

Heerak was fuming when Doseon first saw him at the door, so Doseon thought he was angry, but then Heerak grumbled about the parking lot. Heerak didn’t think to call Doseon, but he thought to search for a paid parking lot. Moreover, Heerak even sprinted at full speed in that outfit without even taking off his jacket, and to top it all off, he was dripping with sweat and wondering why he did all that, what was what made Doseon giggle nonstop.

Doseon cleared his throat and quickly tensed his facial muscles to suppress the corners of his mouth from creeping up. It was because the bewildered face started looking a bit peculiar. Heerak looked like

he could stare holes into Doseon's face, and those intense eyes stared straight at him. Doseon desperately wanted to turn his head away, but he had a feeling that something bad might happen if he did that.

Heerak slowly looked up at the ceiling. Doseon couldn't breathe, as if he was a mouse before a cat.

He had no leisure to feel relieved when the intense eyes were lifted, so Doseon decided to apologize. In any case, it was very rude to laugh in someone's face, and he beat himself for it.

The apology on the tip of his tongue never made it out of his mouth.

Two hands suddenly approached him.

Hot fingers caressed his cheeks, and all he could do was close his eyes.

Lips hotter than the fingers covered Doseon's mouth.

Heat invaded Doseon's mouth, and the intrusive tongue didn't hesitate to devour the inside of his mouth. The sensation of the tip of Heerak's tongue stroking the roof of Doseon's mouth was vivid. Doseon's saliva and breaths were all relentlessly stolen away, and Doseon's legs trembled in response. He felt like his knees would give in at any moment.

Instead of collapsing on the spot, Doseon reached out with both arms and pulled in Heerak wherever Doseon could reach him. Heerak changed his angle in return, and poured out deep kisses once more. It was dizzying and sensual, and Doseon felt like his heart was pounding so hard that it ached.

Everything felt hot.

The tongue freely swirled around his mouth, fingertips brushed his cheeks and temples, and Doseon's breaths were being devoured.

It was a suffocating heat, and Doseon felt like his body was burning up. Heerak probably felt the same. Doseon could feel Heerak's warmth through their pressed lips at every moment, and Doseon's palms that were stroking Heerak's back also felt the other's temperature rising through the fabric.

Finally, their lips slowly pulled away. Doseon breathed raggedly and slowly opened his eyes. Just then, his bottom lip was lightly bitten. It was only grazed for a moment, but Doseon's shoulders jolted at the sudden attack. Heerak lightly smiled with his eyes.

"I'm sorry."

“Pardon?” Doseon tilted his head at the quiet apology.

Heerak sounded concerned and muttered softly, “It just occurred to me that I’m pretty sweaty. You didn’t feel grossed out by me?”

“No, not at all.” Doseon shook his head. He was only feeling the heat; and he didn’t care how much Heerak sweated. He didn’t have the time to be thinking about that.

Doseon raised his right hand and stroked Heerak’s cheek, wiping away a drop of sweat that was trickling down his face. Heerak narrowed his eyes in delight and grinned. Thanks to that grin, Doseon couldn’t easily take his hand away, and after stroking his cheek several times, Heerak reached out and pulled up Doseon’s left hand. Heerak lightly grasped his wrist and gently kissed the back of Doseon’s hand, fingertips, palms, and wherever he could plant his lips on. The hot breaths that touched his hand made Doseon’s body feel weak, and like he could melt at any moment.

“You don’t know how cute and lovable you are when you laugh,” Heerak murmured in a low voice as he kissed Doseon’s thumb and wrist, “And I bet you don’t know how crazy it drives me when you do.” As he continued, his lips tickled the sharp bone of Doseon’s wrist. “Because you don’t know… that was why you laughed like that, right?”

Heerak made a kissing noise on the back of Doseon’s hand, and his lips arched up gently.

Doseon, who was blankly watching the lips traveling across his hand, finally snapped out of it and answered, “Then should I not laugh from now on?”

Of course, he knew very well that Heerak didn’t say that with that intention, and he only said whatever came to mind because he had no idea what else to say.

Heerak snickered and gently released Doseon’s wrist. “I’m asking you to laugh more from now on. Please do that for me.”

Doseon realized that he never got the chance to tell Heerak to come inside, and Heerak was still standing at the doorway with his shoes on. Doseon felt bad for leaving him outside, and pulled the other man into his home.

Heerak plopped on the ground and mumbled, “What a day.”

Doseon increased the strength of the A/C and hurriedly picked up Heerak’s jacket, which was carelessly tossed on the ground. He

couldn't stand to watch such an expensive piece of clothing be neglected on his apartment floor. He cleanly ignored Heerak telling him not to worry about it, and neatly hung his jacket on a hanger, so it didn't wrinkle.

"Before I knew it, it was way past the time you got off of work," Doseon said.

As Doseon partly expected, it seemed like Heerak was very busy today. A few problems cropped up, and he had a guest whom Heerak couldn't tell Seokchan to send away. Heerak continued to sigh as he told Doseon that time flew by before he knew it as he completed tasks one by one.

"Why didn't I think to call you?" Heerak mumbled to himself, "I ran out of my office and just started my car. Before you mentioned it, it had completely slipped my mind that I could have called you."

Heerak must have felt that he was silly because he chuckled. Doseon, who was watching carefully, asked, "Did you eat dinner?"

"Nope. Did you?"

Doseon was relieved that he didn't eat yet. If he had said that he already ate, Heerak would have been very disappointed, and he could tell this by the way Heerak was asking.

"I haven't yet either. I didn't feel like cooking, so I was thinking of just having some ramyun."

"Wow, ramyun."

There was a time when people were amazed when Heerak talked about soondae and kimbap on a cooking show on TV, and when he said that corn dogs and ramyun were his favorite snacks on social media. Heerak said, "People think that people like me go to fancy restaurants and eat steak all the time, but that's not the case," and revealed to the public that he liked various convenience store foods and instant foods, and this was still true .

Luckily, Heerak's favourite instant noodles were in Doseon's kitchen pantry; Doseon's only disappointment was that he didn't have eggs.

"Doseon, did you know that asking me if I wanted to have some ramyun at your house is very suggestive?" Heerak said in a playful tone.

Doseon smiled to himself and mumbled indifferently, "I didn't invite you to eat ramyun, I just said I was going to have some. But if

you want some too, I'll prepare two bags."

"Just two? Would that be filling? Also, why would you be the one to boil the instant noodles? I'll do it, okay? Just sit tight. I'll wash up first, then make some ramyun for you."

"What? You would? No, I can make it while you take a shower."

"No, just sit here. Or is it that you don't trust my skills? I'm very good at making ramyun."

"No, I mean, I can't tell my guest to do that. Also, most people can make ramyun easily. I too have never failed at making ramyun."

They bickered about who would make the noodles for a while. Eventually, Doseon gave in, and he was allowed to go to the store to pick up some eggs while Heerak was in the shower.

Before he left, Doseon gazed at the bathroom door where he heard the water running. He dropped his gaze to the neatly arranged dress shoes. Then, he glanced at the blazer jacket hung up, and he felt a strangely vivid sense of reality. It was something he didn't feel while visiting Heerak's house, but Doseon thought that seeing the traces of the other man dwelling in a familiar place, confirmed once more that the time they spent together was not a dream.

The reality that he was reluctant to believe in finally registered in his head.

Continues in Volume 2

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